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THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF CHARLES HODGE

by

JOHN JEY DEIFELL, JR.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Name of Candidate..... Rev. John Jay Deifell, Jr., B.Sc., B.D.

Address

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Professor Charles Hodge (1797-1878) of Princeton Theological Seminary was the most influential Presbyterian theologian of Nineteenth Century America. Although a prolific writer and active churchman, he never produced a formal treatise on the doctrine of the Church. The purpose of this thesis is to expound critically his ecclesiology and its application to the affairs of his church.

The structure of this study follows Hodge's dualistic treatment of the Church, first, as the idea of the true, invisible Church and second, as the doctrine of the visible Church. Hodge chose to describe the nature of the former in terms of the invisible communion of individual saints. First he begins by defining the saint and uses his perspective of the plan of salvation: sin, election, regeneration, covenant of grace, justification, sanctification and consecration. Second he treats the common (not corporate) relation which all saints personally have with Christ and the Holy Spirit. This gives rise to the saint's internal communion. Then we are led to consider the true Church's attributes of holiness, unity and perpetuity and its promises and prerogatives, all of which are predicated to individual saints in virtue of the common subjective effects of the Holy Spirit and the infallibility of doctrinal, saving truths.

Our study of Hodge's doctrine of the visible Church discovers that he held the intrinsic visibility to be that of the individual profession of faith. The power of the Holy Spirit induces professing Christians voluntarily to form themselves into church societies so as to carry out public religious duties that will enhance their piety. All church power dwells in sensu primo in the people who follow three jure divino principles to organize their church society. First, the people's powers are represented by their elders in exercising the power of order, the power of keys, the power of doctrine and teaching, and the power of serving tables. Through his discussion of these powers, we see his thoughts on church-state relations, public worship, ecclesiastical constitution, discipline and principles of ethics, ways Presbyterians could spread the Gospel and enjoin the moral law, and the extent of the church's responsibility to the power. Second, there is a parity of official ministers who function as rulers with the elders, who teach (preach and administer the sacraments) according to the society's Confession of Faith and who ordain other ministers. Third, the unity of the church society is expressed in an ascending court system whereby the supreme tribunal rigidly secures and perpetuates the peculiar doctrine and polity throughout the whole denomination. Hodge's role as defender of Old School Presbyterianism is seen particularly in the events surrounding the church split of 1837-1838, in his attempt to block the Old School-New School reunion of 1869, in his sectarian view of federal unity and in his rejection of the organic unity of churches.

Hodge's inadequate Christology produced a speculative predestinarianism and a spiritualistic and rationalistic anthropocentrism. This was reflected in a sharp dualism between the invisible and visible Church. He never fully understood the essential reality of the Church as the Body of Christ participating in and witnessing to the continuing and reconciling ministry of Christ in the world.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Professor Charles Hodge (1797-1878) of Princeton Theological Seminary was the most influential Presbyterian theologian of Nineteenth Century America. Although a prolific writer and active churchman, he never produced a formal treatise on the doctrine of the Church. The purpose of this thesis is to expound critically his ecclesiology and its application to the affairs of his church.

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Church. He never fully understood the essential reality of the Church as the Body of Christ participating in and witnessing to the continuing and reconciling ministry of Christ in the world.

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

- BRPR - Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review
- C I - A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians
- C II - A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians
- CH - The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America
- E - A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians
- LCH - The Life of Charles Hodge
- PS - Princeton Sermons
- P.T.S. - Princeton Theological Seminary
- R₁ - A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (1835)
- R₂ - A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (abr. ed., 1843)
- R₃ - A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (rev., 1864)
- ST - Systematic Theology
- WL - The Way of Life

INTRODUCTION

For each generation of Christians there seems to be a pressing concern to understand the nature and mission of the Church. Although ultimately all Christian communities should trace the ground and purpose for their existence out of the first Christian community's union and communion with Jesus Christ, it is helpful in understanding their own problems if they take into account those Christian communities which preceded them. My personal interest in the doctrine of the Church has been engendered by the conflicts in which the Presbyterian Church in the United States had been engaged the last few years. There is serious talk of a split in that communion because of radical differences in such things as the meaning of redemption and reconciliation, the nature of the ministry and the sacraments, the theory of eldership, the visible, organic organization and union of Christians and the responsibility the Church has to the social and political problems of America and the world.¹ One faction

¹Thirty prominent Southern Presbyterian leaders have acknowledged this potential schism in "An Open Letter to the Church", Presbyterian Survey, April, 1967, p. 2. "The existence in our denomination of widely divergent views and growing tensions born of social, political and theological conflicts is a fact which cannot be ignored....Unless present tendencies are checked, our Church seems to be headed toward some sort of division or fragmentation." Since August, 1968, The Presbyterian Journal (a weekly magazine published at Weaverville, North Carolina by an independent staff of polemicists for "Presbyterian-Reformed World") and The Concerned Presbyterian (a Miami, Florida publication of a pressure group dedicated to evangelizing individuals and to keeping the Presbyterian Church, U.S. from involvement in social or ecumenical issues) have increased their open advocacy for a split in the Church. From several recent personal letters from members and ministers of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., I have learned that that schism has become inevitable and now the extreme conservatives are discussing when this should take place.

of this denomination often appeals to the theology and polity of Charles Hodge (1797-1878) for verification of their ecclesiology.¹ In an effort to understand their position I was led to study Hodge's concept of the Church.

After preparing a 155-page paper, "The Major Religious Developments in America: 16-7-1900",² I discovered that the churchmen of Hodge's period not only had problems similar to those of today but also had difficulty in forming a doctrine of the Church. In fact, so manifold were the problems of the Church and the opinions of the American Christian community during the first fifty years of the new nation that I was led to agree with Professor Lefferts A. Loetscher when he said that "the concept of the Church (in that period) was up for grabs."³ Religious liberty, pluralism, revivalism, voluntary benevolent societies and individualism all contributed to the diverse doctrines of the Church among the spectrum of the multiplying religious groups. Even though American denomination-
alism was emerging as the religious pattern for the new nation, many

¹Ben Wilkinson, "An Open Letter to the Establishment", The Presbyterian Journal, Vol. 27, No. 32 (December 4, 1968), p. 7. Jackson, Mississippi's Belhaven College and the Reformed Theological Seminary (A seminary proudly independent of any official Church connection) both use Hodge's Systematic Theology, 3 Vols. (originally published in New York, 1871-1872), (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1960) as their primary theological textbook along with L. Berkof, Systematic Theology, 4th Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949).

²Presented to University of Edinburgh's Professor M.A. Shepperson and the Reverend J.B. Torrance on March 10, 1967.

³Personal interview with Princeton Theological Seminary's Professor Lefferts A. Loetscher at his home, 74 Mercer Street, Princeton, New Jersey, on September 16, 1967.

churchmen readily co-operated and concentrated their pious efforts on meeting the missionary needs of the expanding West and on reforming the morals of American society. Little thought was given to formulating a doctrine of the Church until the rise of innovating doctrines and the large immigration of Roman Catholics began to arouse the attention of the more conservative churchmen, whose theologies were strongly rooted in the traditions of the Old World. Chief among those who became involved in the polemics on the Reformed concept of the Church was Professor Charles Hodge.

Hodge was born in Philadelphia on December 28, 1797, of a family whose ancestors he later described as "Presbyterians and Patriots".¹ He matriculated in the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1812 and after graduation entered the newly formed Theological Seminary at Princeton (the first Presbyterian seminary of America). Within a short time there grew an intimate relationship between President Archibald Alexander and Hodge.² When Hodge finished the seminary in 1819, he followed Alexander's suggestion and spent the next year studying Hebrew, which he began teaching at Princeton Seminary in 1820. Two years later he became Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature. In 1826 he was granted a two year leave of absence to study in Europe. After

¹Archibald A. Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge, D.D., LL.D. (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1881), p. 5.

²This father-son relationship continued up until the former's death in 1851 and was undoubtedly the greatest factor influencing Hodge's character, interests and theology. LCH, p. 47.

studying Arabic for a few months under De Sacy in Paris, he moved to Germany where he became the close friend of August Tholuck, Johann Neander, Ernest Hengstenberg, Otto Von Gerlach and others. Although the piety of these men impressed Hodge, little else did. He seems to have observed the anxious remarks of Alexander who wrote him saying, "I wish you to come home enriched with Biblical learning, but abhorring German philosophy and theology."¹ Hodge returned to Princeton in 1828 and continued his teaching of Biblical studies until 1840 when he became Professor of Exegetical and Didactic Theology. Polemic Theology was added to his responsibilities after Alexander's death in 1851. When Hodge passed away on December 19, 1878, he had taught more than 3000 candidates for the ministry.

Some considered Hodge as the most influential Presbyterian theologian in America, even before his death. In 1872 Professor Packard of the Protestant Episcopal Seminary of Virginia said of Hodge:

When the history of theology in America for the last fifty years shall be impartially written, the foremost name on the list of those who have deserved well of the Church - that name which will shine in letters of light as the first and foremost name on the list - will by the universal consent of all the churches, be the name of Charles Hodge.²

¹LCH, p. 161.

²Proceedings Connected with the Semi-Centennial Commemoration of the Professorship of Rev. Charles Hodge, D.D., LL.D. in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, N.J., April 24, 1872. (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Co., n.d.), p. 88. Other denominations made similar evaluation of Hodge's theological influence. "No theological teacher in this country is better known or more respected. No man probably has done more to determine the course of doctrinal thought and belief in our country (than Charles Hodge)." The Baptist Quarterly, Vol. VI (1872), p. 115.

One Presbyterian leader said that Hodge was "par excellence the representative man in the history of American Presbyterianism."¹ Upon his death, another proclaimed that "no one will challenge his predominant influence in moulding and controlling the general sentiment of the church on controverted questions of doctrine and policy."² However he was challenged throughout his lifetime to the extent that his whole theology was characterized as polemical apologetics. But it can be said in retrospect that Hodge literally dictated the shape and direction of American Presbyterian thought during the majority of his lifetime. This was due not only to the length of his professorship at Princeton, but to his national influence exerted through The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review (a journal that he founded in 1825 and edited until 1871), his prolific correspondence and the publication of numerous popular books - all of which display his wide interests and his attempts to expound and defend strict scholastic Calvinism.

The summation of Hodge's federal dogmatics was contained in his last major literary contribution, his three volume Systematic Theology. This work is divided into three sections: Theology, Anthropology, Soteriology and Eschatology. Charles P. Krauth, Professor of Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, observed, "The most important defect in the plan (of this publication)

¹Francis L. Patton, "Charles Hodge", The Presbyterian Review, Vol. II (April, 1881), p. 349.

²Henry A. Boardman, "Memorial Discourse", Discourses Commemorative of the Life and Work of Charles Hodge, D.D., LL.D. (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, 1879), p. 37.

is that it does not embrace a distinct and full treatment of the doctrine concerning the Church."¹ Hodge's son reported, "After the publication of his Systematic Theology, he often expressed the desire that he might be permitted to complete that work by the addition of a fourth volume embracing the department of Ecclesiology; but he was prevented by the infirmities incident to his advanced age."² The infirmity of age could not have been the sole reason why Hodge did not produce a full treatise on ecclesiology. He had projected such a work early in his life and had spent a great amount of time preparing a book on the Church. His former classmate wrote him in 1849 saying, "I shall read no more side (Presbyterian doctrine of the Church) till I get hold of your book, which if the duration of pregnancy be any indication of the bulk of the thing to be born, will certainly be as much as I can stagger under for the rest of my days."³ Hodge never delivered. One of his students, William Durant, put together segments of some of Hodge's Princeton Review articles in a book entitled The Church and Its Polity. However, this work is very inadequate. It has no theological framework, it gives incomplete portions of certain aspects of ecclesiology and even of the articles it uses, and it does not take into account Hodge's many other published and unpublished writings.

¹LCH, p. 612.

²A.A. Hodge, "Preface", Charles Hodge, The Church and Its Polity, ed. William Durant (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1879), p.iii.

³LCH, p. 431.

Although modern day theologians have recognized Hodge's tremendous influence on American Presbyterianism, none have attempted to unveil his doctrine of the Church. Ralph J. Danhof merely summarizes Hodge's Systematic Theology and claims him to be the "greatest theologian America has ever produced."¹ Others who only recognize Hodge as "the most influential theologian in the Presbyterian Church of his time" have treated either general or selected aspects of his theological system. I have found them most helpful in understanding the antecedent influences on Hodge's thought - especially those in connection with scholastic Calvinism, Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, Rigid Biblicism and individualistic pietism.² Both a generic history and the federal system of Hodge's theology have been previous subjects of dissertations.³

¹Ralph J. Danhof, Charles Hodge As A Dogmatician (Goes, The Netherlands: Oosterban & LeCointre, 1929), pp. 171-172.

²John Dillenberger, Protestant Thought and Natural Science: A Historical Interpretation (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960), p. 234. Cf. Leonard J. Trinterud, "Charles Hodge (1797-1878)", Sons of the Prophets: Leaders in Protestantism from Princeton Seminary, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 22f; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey", The Shaping of American Religion, Vol. I of Religion in American Life, eds. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, 4 Vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 260f; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology", Church History, Vol. XXIV (September, 1955), pp. 266f; Elwyn A. Smith, The Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture: A Study in Changing Concepts, 1700-1900 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 128f, 151f, 221f.

³The principal unpublished dissertations on Hodge or including substantial portions of his theological system are: John Oliver Nelson, "The Rise of the Princeton Theology: A Genetic Study of American Presbyterianism until 1850", Yale University, 1935; Penrose St. Amant, "The Rise and Early Development of Princeton Theology", New College, University of Edinburgh, 1952. Kenneth Paul Berg, "Charles A. (sic) Hodge, Controversialist", The State University of

Therefore, I have limited this thesis to that portion of his thought which neither Hodge nor others have attempted as a formal, comprehensive treatise.

It should be recognized that all the details of Hodge's ecclesiology have not been expounded due to the bulk of his writings which spanned more than half a century. I have attempted to give a critical exposition of only the essential aspects of his doctrine. The emphasis and pattern of his thought demand that the dissertation be divided into two sections: The Doctrine of the Invisible Church and The Doctrine of the Visible Church. The reconciliation of these two doctrines could have been one of the difficulties which prevented Hodge from publishing his book on the Church. I have occasionally used the more consistent ecclesiologies of James Henley Thornwell and John Williamson Nevin as contemporary foils of Hodge's dualistic position. Thornwell (1812-1862), a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in South Carolina, advocated a rigid jure divino concept of the Presbyterian Church. Nevin (1803-1886) was a former student of Hodge and even taught his classes while Hodge was in Europe. But soon after he became a professor at the German Reformed Seminary at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania in 1840, he broke sharply with the prevailing brand of Presbyterianism and became oriented toward a Christological and sacramental concept of the Church.

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Iowa, 1952; James L. McAllister, Jr., "The Nature of Religious Knowledge in the Theology of Charles Hodge", Duke University, 1957; John Walter Beardslee, III, "Theological Development at Geneva under Francis and Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1648-1737)", Yale University, 1956.

The reader should be aware that the quotations given in this dissertation are exact, even though Hodge's language, grammar and punctuation are often either awkward or erroneous. I have used Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1956) to provide a consistent spelling in the case of my own text.

This thesis would not have been possible without the constant encouragement, wise counsel and personal assistance of many friends. I am most grateful to the Reverend J.B. Torrance and Professor T.F. Torrance for not only directing my course of study but for their personal concern and interest. I would also like to thank Professor Lefferts A. Loetscher of Princeton Theological Seminary, Dr. James H. Smylie of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, and Professor M.A. Shepperson of the University of Edinburgh for their advice which has enhanced my understanding of Hodge and his period of history. I appreciate not only all the help given to me by Mr. John V. Howard and the staff of New College Library, but also the kind attention offered by Dr. James S. Irvine and the staff of Speer Library of Princeton Theological Seminary and Mr. Alexander Clark of the Manuscript Division of Princeton University's Firestone Library when I was involved in extensive research during a return visit to America. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Jean Russell for illuminating conversations on the subject and for assisting in proofreading. Gratitude for proofreading is also given to Mr. Keith Hook. Finally, I praise God without

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product of this study.

Section I The Doctrine of the Invisible Church

Chapter I The Idea of the True Church's Nature

What is the Church? In his article reviewing the 1845 Old School General Assembly, Charles Hodge acknowledged the difficulty of answering this question.

We know of no subject in theology on which it is more difficult to attain and preserve distinctness of thought, and precision of language than this. The word church has meanings so allied and yet so different, so well authorized and yet so indefinite, that it is almost impossible to avoid using the term in one sense in the premises of an argument, and another in the conclusion. ... You may, with equal truth, affirm or deny that a given body is a church; you may say that the church is a congregation of saints, and yet composed, in great part, of sinners; that it is infallible as to matters of faith, and yet may fatally apostatize; that all its members shall be saved and yet that many of them will be lost.¹

In his attempt to avoid ambiguity, Hodge considered it an unavoidable necessity to define the Church by using "the distinction between the real and the nominal, or as it is commonly expressed the invisible and the visible Church."² He argued that employing this distinction did not mean there were two separate Churches. Instead these terms defined the sincerity of faith of those who constitute

¹Charles Hodge, "The General Assembly", The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, (July, 1845), pp. 459-460. Cf. Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3 Vols., (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1960), III, p. 547.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 141. Throughout his MSS and publications, Hodge conveys this distinction with such terms as the "spiritual" or "true" Church versus the "outward", "external", "organized" or "empirical" Church. There are numerous occasions when he uses no qualifying adjectives, allowing the context to make the distinction.

the Church, for the "true Church is the body of true believers; and ... the empirical or visible Church is the body of those who profess the true religion, together with their children."¹ Those who denied this distinction, Hodge would say, denied the scriptural idea of the Church, yielded to the evils of Romanism and Anglican ritualism, and thus threatened the "spiritual welfare of our children and of our country."²

The way Hodge distinguished between the "true Church" and the "visible Church" was similar to the separation of its scriptural "idea" and its "appearance."³ He admitted that the true Church was founded on the idea of God's secret election and man's true faith and that the visible Church was based on the credible evidence of competent knowledge and profession of the true religion with resulting fruits of holy obedience.⁴

However, the possession of true faith and its profession were not necessarily identical, because the former was determined by the idea that an individual was a member of the true Church only if he

¹Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), p. 689; "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p. 680.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 139. Cf. Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April and July, 1853); "Draft of Lectures on Systematic Theology with notes on the Church", n.d., MS H6624dr in Speer Library of Princeton Theological Seminary.

³Hodge's distinction between the "idea" of the "true Church" and the manifestation of the "visible Church" has a Platonic flavor. We have appropriated the term "appearance" as indicative of this dualism. By appearance we mean "the phenomenal". Hodge insisted that it was impossible and unscriptural "to make the phenomenal agree with the real, the visible with the invisible Church". Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1863), p. 485.

⁴Hodge, ST, III, pp. 545f, 574f.

had the "inward quality" of sincere faith which God, out of His grace, eternally elected him to have and which only God could judge he possessed; whereas the profession of faith was only the external appearance or claim of such a saving "state of mind."¹ "The question which kingdom an individual belongs to, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan, to the Church or to the world, is decided not by anything external but by the state of his heart."² However, Hodge insisted that no one can judge by appearance the true state of the heart but God. Therefore, one does not know who is actually a true believer, that is, a member of the true Church or body of Christ.³

Nevertheless, because he held that "the world is governed by ideas"⁴ and that the outward life is the reflection of the inward life,⁵ Hodge thought it a necessary task of the Protestant theologian to "independently investigate the internal, invisible, true Church" for only its members are promised salvation.⁶ Therefore, when

¹Hodge, "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p.681f.

²Hodge, "What is the Church?", n.d., MS H6624w at P.T.S.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), p. 461.

⁴Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), p. 607. "It is a recognised truth that the world is governed by ideas. The character of men is formed, their conduct determined, and their destiny decided, in no small degree, by definitions. It is the view which they take of the primary principles of moral and metaphysical truth, that governs their opinions and consequently their conduct". Hodge, "American Board, Special Report of the Prudential Committee", BRPR (January, 1849), p. 33.

⁵"Principles of Church Union, and Reunion of Old and New School Presbyterians", BRPR (January, 1865), p. 279.

⁶"Study of Theology", lecture delivered on August 27, 1847, File D at P.T.S.

faced with the question, "What is the Church?" Hodge invariably starts with the idea of "the true Church" which he defined in terms of those truths necessary for salvation, and then he proceeded to consider how its visible life should be a reflection of the piety of its members.

In commenting on the Westminster Confession of Faith statement about how out of the visible Church "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation," Hodge says that this means "there is no salvation without the knowledge and profession of the gospel," but because the true Church exists beyond the visible Church, it really means that "there is no salvation without faith in Jesus Christ." Thus the true idea of the Church for Hodge was dependent upon the adoption of a proper system of doctrine where only the internal relationship of the individual believers to Jesus Christ determined the membership and the nature of the Church.¹ All his life Hodge defended this idea against any who attempted to make external or corporate relationships as essential to the true Church.

Assuming that all Christians accepted the Apostles' Creed, Hodge often chose its words, "The communion of saints" as the definition from which the idea of the true Church may be analyzed. Dismissing the ideas of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, he declared that the true essence of the Church could only be "The communion of saints, the body of those who are united to Christ by the indwelling of his Spirit." To understand the true nature

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 282f; "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 138f, 148f; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), p. 463.

of the Church from this idea, "it is only necessary to ascertain who are meant by the 'saints', and the nature of their communion."¹

Rather than beginning with the Head or the communion of the Church, Hodge prefers first to discuss the nature of the Church from the character of its members. Therefore when he considers the question, "What is the Church?", he first asks "who constitute the Church?" and says that the true Church can consist only of sincere believers or saints.² It was important for Hodge to define his doctrine of the true Church in terms of the individual saint, because he refused to accept that it depended on any external communion of men. Also the essential character of the Church can be derived from its attributes, promises and prerogatives, and these do not belong to any external, visible society as such, but to the true people of God, more particularly to the individual believer, who in virtue of his faith, is united to Christ, has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him, and is conformed to God's image. Therefore, on the analysis of the saint, and not the Head of or the visibility of the community of faith, does Hodge base his idea of the true Church.³ It will be our purpose in this chapter to

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 250.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 141; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 250f.; "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p. 680. Cf. Hodge, ST, I, p. 135.

³Hodge, "What is the Church?", MS H6624w at P.T.S.; ST, I, pp. 134f; "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p. 676; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 252f. Hodge recognized that his articles entitled "Idea of the Church", BRPR (1853), pp. 249-290, 339-389, had been criticized by some of his Presbyterian

expound Hodge's idea of the true Church as essentially an invisible communion of individual saints.

The True Church Consists of Individual Saints

First, what is a saint? To answer this, Hodge argued that we must first answer, "Who is in Christ?" or "How does one become united to Christ?", for this will determine the way of salvation and only what is essential to salvation is essential to the Church.¹ Who are saints or who are saved can be derived from what Hodge calls the "evangelical system of doctrine" which

starts with the assumption that all men are under the condemnation and power of sin. This is assumed by the sacred writers as a fact of consciousness, and is made the ground of the whole doctrine of redemption. From the guilt of sin there is no method of deliverance but through the righteousness of Christ, and no way in which freedom from its power can be obtained, but through the indwelling of his Spirit. No man who is not united to Christ by a living faith is a partaker either of his righteousness or Spirit, and every man who does truly believe, is a partaker

Contd.]

brethren, who thought he had "made too little of the external Church", but in some of his pursuing writings, he continued to insist that the primary subject of the Church's attributes, promises and prerogatives, as well as its visibility, is the true believer and only secondarily a corporate visible Church society. Cf. Hodge's letter to Bishop McIlvaine, December 29, 1855, cited in A.A. Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1881), p. 418. Hodge's understanding of the relationship of Christ to His Church will unfold throughout the thesis. But for the reader's orientation, it may be stated here that Hodge saw Christ as an abstract Federal Head and King, who imputed spiritual benefits and instituted laws. These were directed ultimately toward the individual's faith and obedience. Thus Hodge thought it necessary to construct his ecclesiology by beginning with the state and response of the individual Christian.

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April 1853), p. 252, (July, 1853, p. 389; "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 157-158; "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), p. 692. Cf. Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 383.

of both, so as to be both justified and sanctified. This union with Christ by the indwelling of his Spirit is always manifested by the fruits of righteousness; by love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Where these fruits of the Spirit are, there, and not elsewhere, is the Spirit; and where the Spirit is, there is union with Christ; and where union with Christ is, there is membership in his body, which is the Church. True believers, therefore, according to the Scriptures, are the *κλητοί*, the *ἐκλεκτοί*, the *ἐκκλησία*. This is the fundamental principle of the evangelical theory respecting the Church.¹

By following this theory, Hodge distinguishes the real Christian from the nominal Christian, and thus the true Church from the nominal Church, because only those who are united to Christ by a living faith which manifests the fruits of the Spirit are really saved and thus members of the true Church.

The primary emphasis Hodge places on private responsibility to believe can be seen in his advocating what the individual must do to be saved:

When the mind is perplexed and anxious from a sense of sin and the accusations of conscience, when the troubled spirit looks round for some way of escape from the just displeasure of God, the voice of mercy from the lips of the Son of God is, come unto me, believe upon me, submit to be saved by me. Till this is done, nothing is done. And when this cordial act of faith in Christ is exercised, we are accepted for his sake, and he undertakes to² save us from the dominion and condemnation of our sins.

While this statement does not convey Hodge's detailed view of salvation, it does reveal how he considered an individual's "cordial act of faith in Christ" as dependent on the prior assumption that

¹Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 140.

²Hodge, The Way of Life (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), p. 147.

each fallen person has a conscious awareness of sin, a free ability of moral action, and a knowledge that God is both just and holy, and thus all people are individually responsible for their own sin and saving faith.

The Private Responsibility of the Sinner

Under Hodge's doctrine of man we should note the relationship of sin, faith and salvation. Adam, before the Fall, had possessed the image of God which included both a rational and a moral nature. The essential attributes of man's rational nature are reason, will and conscience. Because these make up the constitution of man, without which he would cease to be human, every person still "has the intellectual power of cognition, the power of self-determination, and the faculty of discerning between moral good and evil." Thus in Hodge's thought, each man continues to determine his own acts as a free "moral agent because he has the consciousness of moral obligation, and whenever he sins he acts freely against the convictions of conscience or the precepts of the moral law." This "consciousness of moral obligation" included a "sense of justice" which survived the Fall and is retained and revealed differently in the ordinary and in the religious experiences of man, the latter being required for saving faith.¹

Although later it will be necessary for us to understand

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 97, 260f.

what Hodge meant by the moral law and the moral consciousness in the natural experiences of man, and thus their implications for his concept of moral duty, we must here briefly turn our attention to sin's effect on man's religious nature which causes the need for saving faith in order to be a member of the true Church. Hodge taught that Adam's moral nature prior to the Fall consisted of perfect knowledge of God's truth which produces righteousness and holiness. Drawing from New Testament passages describing "the new man" (e.g. Col. 3:10, Eph. 4:24), he declared that Adam's original nature of the image of God, "did not consist merely in man's rational nature, ... but specially in that righteousness and holiness, that rectitude in all his principles, and that susceptibility of devout affections which are inseparable from the possession of the truth, or true knowledge of God."¹ This knowledge is not "merely the faculty of cognition, the ability to acquire knowledge, but the contents of that faculty" without which man cannot exercise his spiritual or religious nature.² Hodge argued that had not Adam "aspired to know for himself what was good and what was evil," to emancipate himself from God's authoritative will to determine such, Adam and each of his descendants would have retained the contents of the knowledge of God, that is righteousness and holiness.

¹Hodge, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), p. 267; ST, II, pp. 99-100.

²Hodge, ST, II, p. 101.

But when Adam exercised his free rational nature by disobediently eating the forbidden fruit, he sinned and thus according to God's divine justice had to suffer the penalty of the Covenant of Works which is eternal spiritual death. Not the sin, but this penalty was imputed to all mankind, thus making the inner principle of each individual guilty and polluted, instead of righteous and holy.¹

The awareness of this guilt and pollution is the first religious experience of man. There already exists an innate knowledge of this among men because they

know they are sinners. They all know that sin, as related to the justice of God, is guilt, that which ought to be punished; and that, as related to his holiness, it renders us polluted and offensive in his sight. They also know, intuitively, that God is just as well as holy; and, therefore that his moral perfection calls for the punishment of sin.²

This coincides with Hodge's argument that to be saved, man must first suffer a conscious awareness of the condemnation and power of sin over against his just and holy God. This is an internal experience and individual responsibility, and does not belong to a community or religious leader such as priests or the Pope, who Hodge insisted could not claim to be the conscience of other men, because only the individual could experience a conviction of sin.³ By this Hodge did not mean that this first step in the plan of salvation could not be taught by members of the true Church. Instead

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 117f, 127f, 188f.

²Hodge, ST, I, p. 421. Cf. Hodge, "Beman on the Atonement", BRPR (January, 1845), pp. 90f.

³Hodge, Proper Method of Dealing With Inquiries (New York: American Tract Society, 1876), p. 4.

he is saying God's way of salvation concerns each man's grasping of the divine truth of God's justice and holiness which only the individual can do by experiencing a just sense of his own guilt, a sense of his own moral pollution and a sense of helplessness.¹

It would appear by Hodge's treatment of sin that the individual can be convinced of his sin and thus know his religious obligations, apart from his hearing the Gospel, his participation in the sacraments, or his membership in a visible Christian community. This might be understood in Hodge's point that the Holy Spirit, communicating through the moral law, convinces each man of his sin, after which he can embrace the Gospel. But does this not separate the Law from the Gospel, especially when he also argues that among all men there is universal consciousness of law, which he defines as the "nature and will of God"?²

Hodge held that since the Fall, each individual suffers from a spiritual inability which "consists in the want of power rightly to discern spiritual things, and the consequent want of all right affections toward them." Man cannot voluntarily recognize the depth of his guilt and pollution, so as to turn away from it. In his present fallen religious nature, each man "cannot change his own heart; he cannot regenerate his soul; he cannot repent with godly sorrow or exercise that faith which is unto salvation. He cannot, in short, put forth any holy exercise or perform any act

¹Ibid., pp. 8-11.

²Hodge, WL, pp. 41-96; ST, II, pp. 180-192.

in such a way as to merit the approbation of God."¹

The religious effects of the Fall, in Hodge's thought, are described mainly in terms of the individual's loss of the knowledge of God which causes guilt and a polluted nature. There seems to be little reference to the effects of sin on man's relation to his fellow man or to the world.² He seems to consider sin more as a specific imputed evil resident in the individual's inward mind, causing him to oppose God's justice and holiness, than as an evil in which men participate as they reject God's grace and love for his world. This view suggests that man stands alone in his own

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 261-264. Here it must be understood that Hodge distinguishes the ability pertaining to "the things of God" or "things connected with salvation" from the ability pertaining to "justitie civilis" or "things external". The latter ability man always has and uses to perform his social duties which "secure the approbation of his fellow-men." Cf. Hodge, "Prof. Park and the Princeton Review", BRPR (October, 1851), p. 681.

²Hodge, ST, II, pp. 129-277; WL, pp. 41-96. Hodge does accept the basic unity of mankind in moral sin and that "all (men) influence the destiny of each; and each influences the destiny of all", but this he recognizes in the context of God's moral government or the natural experiences of men. Hodge, A Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans, Abr. ed., (Philadelphia: Perkins and Purves, 1843), p. 136. His doctrines of the federal union of Adam with posterity and of the immediate imputation of guilt are discussed primarily in the relationship between the religious nature and experiences of man and God's justice, and as such "there is no mysterious oneness of the race, no transfer of moral character, no assumption of the moral guilt of men for the sin of Adam." "Prof. Park and Princeton Review", BRPR (October, 1851), p. 679. Cf. Hodge, "Review of an Article in The Christian Spectator on Imputation", BRPR (No. III, 1830); "Doctrine of Imputation", BRPR (No. III, 1831). Hodge rejects the ontology of "community of nature" and insists that only individuals are responsible for sin with its federal imputation of guilt and pollution from Adam. Hodge, "The First and Second Adam", BRPR (April, 1860), pp. 362f.

guilt and pollution, and that he commits sin only as an individual, doing this primarily in respect to God's abstract nature of righteousness and holiness. Are sin and salvation private, spiritual matters, or do they also concern the corporate and cosmic nature of all creation? If sin can be known intuitively by all men and concerns each individual's spiritual inability to discern and to have the right affections toward "the things of the Spirit", then the plan of salvation and thus the nature and mission of the true Church must not be concerned essentially with corporate sin, guilt and pollution, or with the total redemption of God's people. Instead Hodge seems to infer that it is only the individual who needs regeneration, justification and sanctification, and not communities, the visible Church, nations, or the moral order of the universe. "The gospel is a message from God to individual sinners," regardless of their community context.¹

The Saint Is Elected to Regeneration

Hodge said that "the nature of the Church, ... must depend on the nature of the gospel call."² Although all men are aware of sin and its penalty, only those elected to receive the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit are adequately convinced of the extensive nature

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 345. This might be partially due to Hodge's dismissal of the view that the human personality in need of redemption includes both the soul and the body and also his insistence that the individual's soul has an existence apart from the visible world. Hodge, "What is Christianity?", BRPR (January, 1860), pp. 133f.

²Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 345; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 255.

of sin, so as to have a personal desire to be released from guilt and pollution, to repent, to believe and thus to become a member of the true Church.

Even though Hodge says that the scriptural word for Church is "the word ἐκκλησία from ἐκκαλεω, 'evocare', (which) means an assembly or body of men evoked, or called out and together," he insists that the call itself is to repentance and to faith, which can only be "personal duties."¹ But before men can perform these conditional duties admitting them to the true Church, God, out of His Grace, must elect them to receive the effectual call of the Holy Spirit, and this is done after Adam's Fall in respect to an undetermined number of selected individuals.²

Hodge does say that there is a general or external call "addressed to all men indiscriminately," that this is "the means ordained by God to gather in his chosen people," and that therefore the Church is commanded to preach God's plan of salvation to the world and exhort all sinners to repent and believe. However Hodge insists that the divine command "to believe no more implies the

¹Ibid., p. 253f; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 345. It is interesting that Hodge never uses the Hebrew word קָהָל or expounds the significance of the gathered assembly. He rejects the theocratic church-state relationship of the Old Testament and fails to discuss the visible gathered assembly as the true Church. Cf. Hodge, ST, III, pp. 547f.

²Hodge rejects supralapsarianism, because it unscripturally places God's purpose to redeem before his purpose to create, and because he believed that God elected individual men to be saved from their sins and not to be chosen before creation as "redeemed men (the Church)" in order to reveal the glory of God to all rational creatures. Hodge, ST, II, pp. 316f; E, pp. 171f.

intention on the part of God to give faith, than the command to love implies the intention to give love." It seems as if Hodge makes use of the external call as a rational declaration of the scriptural plan of salvation to justify God's condemnation of those individuals who reject it.¹ Hodge says, we know that "whatever actually is, it must be for God to permit to be. And ... whatever He permits to be, it must be right for Him to intend to permit." Thus from the empirical facts, we know God permits the external call, and although he wishes all sinners to hear it, God intends only the elected saints to obey it.

Hence, it is the effectual internal call and not the external call which forms the true Church. This Hodge designates as a work of efficacious grace which is operative through the Holy Spirit in the minds of individuals selected by the good and sovereign pleasure of God. Hodge does not deny that the Holy Spirit has influence on all individuals, peoples and churches so to order their external moral and religious life. This he calls "common grace", or the general influence of the Spirit to excite good and to restrain evil in every man, but this works within the "natural operations of the mind", and does not secure the individual in the saving knowledge of the truth which produces regeneration, repentance, faith and a holy life. The latter is secured only in the heart of the elected

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 643, 653. Hodge considers the rejection of the Gospel as separate from the rejection of the moral law which continues to bind all men as "rational and moral creatures to God" as "their Creator and moral Governor." Ibid., p. 642.

saint by the irresistible inward call of the Holy Spirit and cannot be recognized as valid by anyone but the individual saint.¹

Thus the true Church consists only of those effectually called, or those saints who obey the call and become true penitent believers. Each must turn away from others of the world who are guilty and polluted and each must believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. Here again, this is a private inward act so that Hodge can say the called are not necessarily those who have joined a visible church, those who outwardly profess faith, or those who are baptized. Instead the called are a collection of individuals elected to receive the Holy Spirit's gift of faith and obedience, thus forming the Church or the communion of saints.²

From the above we have seen Hodge viewing the nature of the Church as primarily those elected individuals whom God calls internally to repentance, faith and obedience by the efficacious power of the Holy Spirit. Hodge does not say whether God calls his Church collectively as a people or individually, but it would

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 639-732. Hodge seems to contradict himself when, on the one hand, he condemns Quakers for accepting the authority of the Holy Spirit without accompanying external evidence that is satisfactory to other people, while, on the other hand, he condemns the Puritans for judging whether an individual has been effectually influenced by the Holy Spirit. Hodge, ST, I, pp. 98f; III, pp. 569f.

²Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 255-258. Hodge said that when those who were professors of the true religion in a New Testament Church were called saints, this did not prove all were true penitent believers, and members of the true Church, but only means they were addressed as saints. Ibid., p. 258. Cf. Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 348.

seem that the latter is the case for these reasons: 1) in Hodge's thought, ἐκκλησία consists of the κλητοί collectively or aggregately and not corporately considered; 2) obedience to the call to repent and to believe are personal duties; 3) Hodge considered "the called" and "the elect" as convertible terms, and insists "that individuals, and not communities or nations, are the objects of election;"¹ 4) the Holy Spirit operates effectually on individuals so as to call each saint to repent and to believe; 5) no visible group or external body receives God's call, or together believe and obey the call. Thus we may conclude that Hodge thought the true Church was called into existence with the individual saint as its basic ecclesiastical atom, because it is only the individual who is elected, called and given the gift of the Holy Spirit.²

As sin effects only the spiritual relationship of the individual to God, leaving him spiritually dead with "no merit to recommend him to God, and no strength to change his own heart," and as only elected individuals receive the effectual call of the Holy Spirit, so too regeneration is the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit only in the mind of the individual saint, causing his soul to pass from a state of spiritual death into a state of

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 640, 333; E, p. 35. It is interesting to note that Hodge never refers to Christ being the Elect One, in whom our election is manifested and made real. Nor does Hodge speak of Israel as an elect nation or the Church as an elect community.

²See our pp. 34f for how Hodge related election to the covenant of grace.

spiritual life.¹ A brief exposition of Hodge's thought on regeneration which every man must experience in order to be saved and to be a saint and thus a member of the true Church, could be best made in terms of the agent, the subject and the effects of regeneration so as to reveal its influence on his idea of the Church.²

The agent is not the saint, because as a sinner he is incapable of anything spiritual. Culture, moral or rational persuasion, or any external influence of society or the Church cannot cause regeneration, because the individual's mind can refuse these. Regeneration is the infusion of a new spiritual principle and new habits of grace, and by its nature, precludes the intervention of second causes as much as the original creation does, in that only God has the omnipotence to create, which in this case is new spiritual life. This is why a man must be born of the Spirit and have the Spirit dwelling in him before he can have a new spiritual nature capable of saving knowledge and membership in the true Church. Hodge thought of regeneration as the special work of the Holy Spirit. It was only related to Christ in that because of His work of Atonement, Christ was rewarded by the Father with the right to send the Holy Spirit to those individuals who were promised

¹Hodge, WL, pp. 95-96; ST, II, pp. 700f; ST, III, pp. 30f. Cf. ST, II, pp. 246f.

²Unless otherwise designated, the following exposition will be drawn from these works of Hodge: ST, II, pp. 675-732; III, pp. 3-40. "Regeneration and the Manner of its Occurrence", BRPR (No. II, 1830), pp. 250-297; "Remarks on Dr. Cox's Communication", BRPR (No. IV, 1831), pp. 514-543; Princeton Sermons: Outlines of Discourses, Doctrinal and Practical, Delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary on Sabbath Afternoons (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1879), pp. 136-139.

as His inheritance or His Church. The new life does not come from any mystical presence of His life in the saint or from the divine-human person of Christ effected in His Incarnation. Instead it comes from the distinct person of the Holy Spirit communicating a new and abiding principle of life to the soul.¹

The subject of regeneration is the individual saint or rather the soul of the elect. The true Church is regenerated only as a collection of regenerated individuals. The organized visible Church, society or humanity cannot be renewed, because regeneration, subjectively considered, is a spiritual change wrought in the soul of the individual. By discounting that the Incarnation of Christ has bearing on the renewal of mankind, Hodge seems to propose that the individual, in isolation of the community or from history, is regenerated by the isolated act of the Holy Spirit. He insists that because the true Church is not a visible society, the real subject of regeneration can only be the communion of saints, who each having been spiritually reborn, manifests its effects or evidences.

Regeneration does not change the substance of the saint's

¹Hodge accepted the word of God (the Bible), the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and prayer as the means of grace or the "ordinary channels" of "the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit, to the souls of men", but he insisted that these do not cause regeneration. By criticizing Martin Luther's insistence that the Holy Spirit operates efficaciously only "through the Word and Sacraments", and by himself insisting that the Holy Spirit renews apart from the visible Church (e.g. elected individual infants are regenerated), it appears that Hodge rejects the Church, the sacraments, the Bible as essential means of the Spirit's work of regeneration. "The Spirit, it is to be ever remembered, is a personal agent who works when and how He will." Hodge, ST, III, pp. 466f, 482f, 499f, 516f, 599f.

soul but its character. This new character can be described because Christ was a new man as the Second Adam, in that He had perfect knowledge of God. But whereas the regenerated individual does not have his being in the life of Christ, he does have a new heart that is spiritually illuminated so as to have right knowledge and right feeling. The "things of the Spirit" become the chief objects of desire and pursuit, and all the energies of the new-born soul are directed towards the spiritual, as distinguished from the seen and temporal. Regeneration does not effect the physical, intellectual, social, or moral life, because these remain adequately apprehendable even with the spiritually dead. God's moral government of his external world is effected through the laws of second causes, human agency and rational influences, but his communicating the new life to the soul is without the efficiency of mediate action, for it is through the immediate work of the Holy Spirit. As a good tree is known to be good if its fruit is good, so the renewed individual can be known by the evidences of regeneration. The saint will exercise true faith and holy obedience.¹

As Hodge argues that the true Church consists only of regenerated men, we may conclude from his view of regeneration that the creation of the Church is a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit

¹Hodge insisted that God had not given men the power to read the heart to see whether another individual was renewed or not, and that there can be no infallible evidence of regeneration to the naked eye. Nevertheless, there should be sufficient evidence to convince each individual that he has been renewed. Cf. Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 141; PS, pp. 136-139; ST, III, pp. 561-577; ST, II, p. 673.

isolated from the visible and historical Christian community. The Church's new life can be described as a change in the heart of the individual saint, so that he has, knows and aspires to spiritual life. The Church should not be described either as a new humanity involving an implantation of the life of Christ or as a corporate visible fellowship with re-created human relationships. Instead, the true Church should be described as an invisible collection of individual renewed souls, "whose object is not self, not the world or creatures, but God," and whose new life can be evidenced in the faith and holiness of each saint. Hodge seems to advocate that the true Church is a mere appendage of each saint's renewed spirituality, and so rejects the thought that the center of the new life of the Church is the historical person of Christ, whose own complete life is continued and subjectively developed in the outward and the inward life of the body of His people.¹

The Saint Is Partner of the Covenant of Grace

As we have seen in our discussion of Hodge's doctrines of sin, vocation and regeneration, the most consistent point he stresses as these doctrines pertain to the plan of salvation and the idea of the true Church is that the relationship in question exists only between the saint and God, and not necessarily between

¹Hodge, "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 148-192. In his attempt to refute those who viewed the Church as an extension of Christ's Incarnation, Hodge also rejected the mystical mediation of Christ's life through His Church. Hodge, "What is Christianity?", BRPR (January, 1860), pp. 119-161; ST, III, pp. 18f.

the individual and the community, or the community and God. This is more vividly recognized in Hodge's use of covenants as the mode of representing the plan of salvation. An individual becomes a saint and thus a member of the true Church when he fulfills the conditions of the covenant of grace. The "transactions between God and man" can only be thought of as a "mutual compact" or "covenant". "There is a covenant," wrote Hodge, "when one person assigns a stipulated work to another person with the promise of a reward upon the condition of the performance of that work." Therefore, in a covenant, there are two "parties, mutual promises or stipulations, and conditions."¹

Although Hodge never used "Covenant Theology", as did the American Puritans, to express the collective essence of God's promises to His people who were to work together to bring in God's kingdom, where His will would be done in all of men's earthly affairs,² Hodge did consider it as the only theological representation of the scriptural plan of salvation in which each man was unconditionally dependent on God for all "spiritual things". By the strict application of his definition of covenant, he divided creation and redemption, assigning the former to God's external plan for natural man and the latter to God's spiritual plan for His elected, regenerated saints or His true Church. The covenants are

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 354f; "Beman on the Atonement", BRPR (January, 1845), pp. 129f; Lecture, "Covenant of Grace", September 6, 1848, "Lecture Notes 1824-1849", MS A1. Alc., at P.T.S.

²For discussions of the early American Puritan theology and sociology, see John Cotton, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace 3rd Ed. (London: Peter Walker, 1671) and Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1939), especially pp. 365-491.

concerned with man's spiritual destiny and for such God created and designed them. If man was to have spiritual communion with God and to attain eternal life, he had to become and remain a covenant partner, which meant he should truly believe and obey the eternal decrees of God for the spiritual world and adhere to God's sovereign, just and holy nature. The dualism between creation and redemption in Hodge's separation of the natural and the spiritual will become increasingly evident to us, but it can be noted here that Hodge thought of the covenantal relationship between God and man as one of metaphysical abstraction, even though he attempted to use the covenant concept to portray the plan of salvation as a concrete, historical redemption of the true Church.¹

If the covenant is contingent upon the spiritual faith and individual obedience of the saint, Hodge would argue that its primary relevance for the visible Church could be questioned.

The doctrine that the promises which are made to true believers belong to the external church; that the covenant of grace is made with a visible society, and its benefits secured and conveyed by external rites to the members of that society, has rested like a blight on the church for ages. Its whole tendency is to change religion into formality; to substitute external observances for the work of the Spirit.²

The partner of the covenant of grace is not a community or visible

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 313-316, 354-377, 516-543. Hodge said "that it is inconsistent with the holiness and justice of God that he should enter into communion with sinners," therefore a new covenant arrangement had to be established, apart from the natural created order. Hodge, A Discourse Delivered at the Funeral of Mrs. Martha Rice, May 7, 1844 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1844) pp. 8f.

²Hodge, "Introduction", The Faithful Mother's Reward (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1853), p. ix.

Church, but the elected, regenerated member of the true Church. No person or visible Church has been given the right or power to judge who is truly a covenant partner or member of the true Church. Therefore the essential spiritual relationship and responsibility of a saint is with God and not necessarily with another saint or the community. God's covenant must be satisfied by personal faith and obedience before an individual believer can actually receive any of the covenant's benefits which stipulate him as a member of the true Church. The first of these imputed benefits is justification.

The Saint Is Justified by Christ

Hodge does not expound his idea of the true Church under the doctrine of justification, but because he argues that to determine the nature of the Church, it is necessary to say who is a justified saint, we need to briefly set forth the need for justification, its accomplishment by Christ, and its application and consequences for the saint or the true Church. This can best be stated through the three covenant "transactions between God and man", which Hodge employs to show how a justified saint is a partner of the covenant of grace, which was founded on the covenant of redemption, but which presupposed the covenant of works.

The covenant of works, as the initial relationship between God and Adam, remained in effect as long as both parties fulfilled their promises and conditions. But since Adam sinned, each soul in posterity has been imputed with the covenant's penalty of guilt

and pollution, which prevents him from ever fulfilling the covenant of works. All those not in the true Church still live under this continuing covenant, which each man knows, by intuition or scripture, as the law of God. Thus each individual knows that he is condemned and tries to satisfy God's justice by outward efforts or association. Hodge would argue that each person who continues to seek his righteousness through good works, identification with ecclesiastical societies, or visible religious rites is outside the true Church. This is why he denounced the Roman Catholic and the Ritualistic Anglican doctrines of the Church as "destructive of true religion ... (and which lead) to security in the indulgence of sin and commission of crimes." No man may gain access to God as long as he is under the obligation to satisfy divine justice. Performing internal or external works is not going to release him from spiritual condemnation. Therefore he must be punished with eternal death or acquitted of his guilt before he can become a justified saint, and be delivered of the demands and curse of the law or covenant of works.¹

Following the federal system of Francis Turretin and Hermann Witsius,² Hodge employs the doctrinal scheme of distinguishing between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace in order to show how man's guilt (not the individual's sins) was assumed by

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 120f, 188f, 230f, 375f, 476f; "Oxford Tracts", BRPR (January, 1838), pp. 98-113; "Beman on the Atonement", BRPR (January, 1845), pp. 112f; "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 155f.

²Cf. Francis Turretin, Institutio Theologiae Elencticae (Edinburgh: John D. Lowe, 1847) Vol. II, pp. 155f; Hermann Witsius, The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity, Trans. William Crookshank (Edinburgh: Thomas Turnbull, 1803), Vol. I, pp. 44f, 167f.

Christ and thus removed from each elected, regenerated saint the obligation to satisfy divine justice. Hodge also argued that the two covenants are necessary, because they differed concerning their contracting parties, their promises and their conditions. "Those who ignore the distinction between the covenants of redemption and of grace, merging the latter in the former, of course represent the parties to the covenant to be God and Christ as head and representative of his own people. And therefore mankind, as such, are in no sense parties." But because it is the individual man who is elected and regenerated and it is he who is offered salvation on the condition that he has true faith, there has to be a separate covenant between the individual saint and God. But to Hodge, man's faith was faith in what Christ had accomplished, therefore the covenant of grace was founded on the covenant of redemption. Nevertheless, it seems as if Hodge removes the true Church from any real relationship with redemption, because he insists that the only parties of the covenant of redemption were God the Father and God the Son, who in eternity agreed to obligatory conditions with resulting promises. The formation of the covenant of redemption was prior to creation as was God's purpose of election. Although the fulfillment of its conditions and the application of its promises were carried out in history with special reference to true saints, the true Church seems to be considered by Hodge, not as the actual Body of Christ, but as Christ's reward if He would undergo incarnation and atonement.¹

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 357, 362, 546f. Cf. Hodge, E, pp. 30-35.

Hodge argued that Christ in eternity accepted the assignment of the Incarnation, because only in (on) this condition, could He suffer the penalty of the law (covenant of works) and satisfy God's justice. Christ's actual human nature has no important bearing on the nature of the Church, other than it is the only form in which He could obey and suffer adequately so as to fulfill the contract with the Father, purchase the Church, and communicate to each saint spiritual life.¹

In explaining the doctrine of the person of Christ, Hodge said that the divine and the human nature of Christ were related as are the soul and the body in the constitution of man. The soul he identified as mind or self-conscious spirit which had a separate existence from the body which he defined as matter. Christ's divinity is of the substance or nature of God, and His humanity is of the matter of man. These remain distinct but united in the one person of Christ, Who was truly God and truly man. Hodge treated the hypostatical union of the two natures of the one person of Christ in such a way that the personality of Christ was referred to the divine nature, was not limited to time and space, and was not extended to His humanity which remained impersonal in and of itself. In other words, the human nature of Christ did not include the incarnational assumption of fallen humanity. Instead it was the mode of appearance of God in the world that established a "bond of sympathy" between His divine nature and His people, the Church.

¹Hodge, "Bushnell's Discourses", BRPR (April, 1849), pp. 282f; ST, II, pp. 396f.

By possessing "an eternal Spirit", Christ made the obedience and suffering of His human nature the obedience and suffering of His divine person and thus of infinite and eternal merit.¹

But the application of Christ's righteousness was one of forensic imputation of the accomplished promises of the covenant of redemption to those individuals elected to possess the same "eternal Spirit". There seems to be a detachment of the person of Christ from the work of Christ in Hodge's doctrine of the Incarnation. Nowhere in his writings does he treat Christ's human nature as ontologically significant for Christ's work. Justification seems to be a legal fiction in that it does not involve humanity's union with the person of Christ. It has no reference to time and space and involves only the elected individual's spiritual guilt being pronounced objectively just for eternal salvation. Neither humanity nor the moral order of the universe were effected by the person of Christ. Thus Hodge contended that the Incarnation had meaning only for the elected saint, and cannot be viewed as the root of a holy fellowship of men in communion with God in and around the person of Jesus Christ. Hodge does say that in virtue of our union through faith with Christ, we are what He is. "We are the sons of God in Him. And what he did, we did. His righteousness is our righteousness. His life is our life."² But as

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 378-454; "The First and Second Adam" BRPR (April, 1860), pp. 365f; PS, pp. 25-67; "Bushnell's Discourses", BRPR (April, 1849), pp. 293f.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 127.

we shall see in our discussion of "Relation to Christ",¹ Hodge thought that "His life is our life" meant that each believer was forensically imputed with the benefits of Christ's work and did not mean the saint actually had Christ's real life imputed to him or that together saints had a corporate communion in the person of Jesus Christ.

In short, Hodge insists that our redemption and our reconciliation with God is founded not on who Christ is, but on what He does,² for otherwise our justification would be subjective and rest upon our new righteous nature. To say that we are justified "because the divine and human are united in Christ, and we derive from Him, through the Church and the sacraments, the power of this divine-human life,"³ Hodge argued, refutes the doctrine of imputation, confuses justification and sanctification, destroys hope by making salvation dependent upon man instead of God, and makes the Church infallible. Hodge says "the man is to be pitied who dares" to believe his justification is due to the identity of God and man "shown perfectly in Christ, and through Him, is realized more and more perfectly in the Church."⁴ Thus Hodge considered Christ's Incarnation as the condition He had to undertake to fulfill both passively and actively the eternally instituted covenant of redemption.⁵

¹See our pp. 50f.

²Hodge, ST, II, pp. 538, 585.

³Ibid., p. 732.

⁴Hodge, ST, III, p. 212; II, p. 589.

⁵The polemics of Hodge regarding the Incarnation are said mainly in the context of the Mystical Theology that followed the
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The second condition of the covenant of redemption was Christ's work of Atonement, which Hodge called the "cardinal doctrine of the gospel."¹ This "work of Christ is a real satisfaction, of infinite inherent merit, to the vindictory justice of God; so that He saves his people by doing for them, and in their stead, what they were unable to do for themselves, satisfying the demands of the law in their behalf, and bearing its penalty in their stead." The thrust of this federal judicial theory of Atonement is not unlike Anselm's in that it seems to be an attempt to answer a dilemma between God's justice and his mercy. Even though Hodge

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Reformation, but they are directed toward the 19th Century German mediating school of theology, which had its American representation in the works of John W. Nevin from Mercersburg Seminary. Nevin used Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper to show how the Incarnation included a mystical union and reconciliation of God and man in Jesus Christ whose whole person "lives and works in the Church, supernaturally, gloriously, mysteriously, and yet really and truly." His true humanity becomes ours, and yet this mystical union is not the repetition of Christ's hypostatical union in the person of each believer or the Church, but instead it is our participation in His righteous humanity which is the outward and the inward life of the Church and the foundation of the sacraments. John W. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1846), pp. 54f, 67f, 164-177. Hodge considered this pantheism because this would mean there is no distinction between Christ and his Church. Christ's person is the "object" of the Church's faith, not the life of the Church. Cf. Hodge, ST, II, pp. 428-454, 527-543, 581-589, 730f; ST, III, pp. 117f, 127f, 199-212; "What is Christianity?", BRPR (January, 1860); "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848). See our pp. 211f for how Nevin and Hodge differed as to the presence of Christ, in the Lord's Supper.

¹Hodge, "Beman on the Atonement", BRPR (January, 1845), pp. 84, 101, 116. This account of Hodge's doctrine of the Atonement is taken from this article and from "Bushnell on Vicarious Sacrifice", BRPR (April, 1866), pp. 161-194; ST, II, pp. 480-591, unless otherwise designated.

admitted that Christ's atoning life and death showed forth the excellence of divine love, he insisted that this theory of penal satisfaction by Christ's substitution was primarily necessary to display the gravity of man's guilt and the perfection of Christ's righteousness, and also in order that God might remain just in justifying the sinner. Although Hodge argues that the purpose of the Atonement was not to promote the happiness, holiness and goodness of the world, but was to satisfy God's justice and to fulfill the conditions of the covenant of redemption, he does say that the effects of Christ's atoning work do exhibit God's wisdom, justice and love which lead men to repentance and promote the best interest of God's Kingdom. Nevertheless, it seems that Hodge views salvation as a result of divine justice instead of divine grace, and that this justice is only satisfied for the individual saint's eternal spiritual destiny, and not also for the life of the historical, visible body of Christians.¹

If Christ had had man's moral character when He suffered Atonement, His fulfillment of the law would not be perfect unto righteousness. While expounding how Christ's Atonement was both passive and active as seen in His sufferings and His death, Hodge does not stress the person of Christ in these atoning acts. As we

¹Just before he died, Hodge penned his last published article in which he said, "The whole plan of salvation is subverted" if one dismisses "that there is no such attribute in God as justice and no such thing as guilt in man. By justice is not meant benevolence, nor mere governmental rectitude, but the divine perfection which renders it certain God will punish sin." "Guilt in man is the relation which sin bears to justice...If justice be satisfied then guilt is removed." Hodge, "A Last Word", The Presbyterian, September 27, 1879, p. 4.

observed in his view of Incarnation, this might be the reason why Hodge thought that the relation of Christ to the Church centered in the merits of Christ's work and not in either the nature of the Redeemer or the Church's kinship with His person. Hodge does make the point that Christ was guiltless though made under the law, and that Christ, in His atoning work, assumed the guilt of man's sins while retaining all righteousness. But assuming guilt meant to Hodge accepting the divine, judicial penalty and not incorporating the fallen nature of humanity.¹

Having fulfilled the conditions of the covenant of redemption by His Incarnation and Atonement, Christ was granted the Father's reward - the salvation of the true Church, the divine inheritance for His works.

If Christ suffered by covenant, and fulfilled all the conditions of that covenant, then he acquired a right to its promises. If he purchased his Church he has a right to it. If it was promised that for his obedience to death, he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, then he, having done all that was required of him, has a right to the promised reward. But what right have we? None in the world; ... our only hope is that we shall be treated, not according² to our deserts, but according to the merits of another.

The sinner has no right to the redemptive rewards of the Father-Son covenant. But in order to be saved, he needs these rewards. Therefore God sets up the covenant of grace with elected individuals, with Christ acting as mediator.

¹Hodge, ST, II, p. 535. Hodge could not accept that Jesus Christ, as "an individual man", included "the whole of humanity in himself." "To say that 'humanity itself was nailed to the cross,' conveys no rational idea."

²Hodge, "Beman on the Atonement", BRPR (January, 1845), p. 121. Cf. Hodge, ST, II, p. 362.

It should be noted at the start that Hodge does not consider Christ to be a party to or the fullness of this covenant, but only its mediator. Having intervened between God's demand for justice and the saint's guilt, Christ offers His work of righteousness to God for the saint and guarantees to the saint that God's justice has been satisfied sufficiently so that individually he can be assured that the Father will not condemn him. "As reconciliation of parties at variance is a work of mediation, Christ is called our mediator."¹

It seems as if the work of Christ designates Him as mediator, and not His person which is only necessary to make Him qualified for His work. We might raise the question that if our gaining access to God is due only to the righteous work of Christ judicially imputed to us, what significance is our union with Christ Himself? Is the Church founded on the person and the work of Christ or just on the secured benefits of the covenant of redemption offered to each person elected to be a partner of the covenant of grace? The way Hodge defines grace seems to indicate the latter. It is the "unmerited gift" of the "supernatural influence of the Holy Ghost", "secured by the work of Christ", and applied to the elect so as to render Christ's redemption certain for salvation.² If grace is not Christ, how can the covenant of grace or the plan of salvation and thus the true Church have any visible, historical expression? If divine grace is "preeminently" the influence of the Holy Spirit

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 364, 455-459.

²Ibid., p. 357.

separated from the Incarnation, then those members of the covenant of grace or the true Church are merely a collection of individuals who privately have a purely spiritual relationship with God which has no actual relevance for the world of matter or the human community.

Hodge's metaphysical construction of election seems to make the covenant of grace and the true Church even more abstract. He insists that "election precedes redemption", meaning that God had determined whom He would make members of the covenant or Church "before He sent his Son to save them."¹

Membership in the invisible (true) church is not vital union with Christ, or regeneration by the Holy Ghost! ... (The true Church) consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof. It includes, therefore, probably millions of the unborn and millions of the unconverted.... It is not their vital union with Christ, nor their actual regeneration by the Holy Ghost, that is presumed, but their election.²

In some places Hodge attempts to relate election to history, by saying that God selected individuals "from the mass of fallen men" to be members of the true Church or the covenant of grace. The form of the covenant or the plan of salvation upon which the Church is founded has been the same in all dispensations. It can be offered to all men, for "the great sin of those who hear the gospel is that they refuse to accept of that covenant, and therefore place themselves without its pale."³

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 547f.

²Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 375-376.

³Hodge, ST, II, pp. 319f, 366f, 363f; ST, III, pp. 549f.

But due to "the nature of the covenant between the Father and the Son", the covenant of grace has "special reference to the elect." Hodge observed that "when mankind are divided into two classes, the Church and the world, ...whatever is affirmed distinctively of one class is impliedly denied of the other."¹ This means that the fulfillment of the covenant's conditions and its promises (e.g. justification) is reserved for divinely elected individuals, who alone are the true parties of the covenant and objects of God's special love.

"The condition of the covenant of grace (and membership in the true Church), so far as adults are concerned, is faith in Christ."² Insisting that there is no merit in believing, Hodge nevertheless argued that the covenant's promises are "suspended upon the act of asking". Even though the terms of the covenant of redemption were completed and Christ's benefits are available for distribution to each elected saint, the individual has to believe first, before he can be justified and be saved. "The people of God are not justified from eternity. They do not come into the world in a justified state. They remain (if adults) in a state

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 363, 549.

²Ibid., p. 364. Hodge held that infants were members of the covenant and true Church because there is an "intimate and divinely established connexion between the faith of parents and the salvation of their children." Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture", BRPR (October, 1847), pp. 508f. But to Hodge, the infant's saving admission to the invisible Church was not effected by the sacrament of baptism, which was attached to the visible Church. Cf. Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 347-389. See our pp. 194f for Hodge's doctrine of baptism.

of condemnation until they believe."¹

It would seem by strict identification of saving faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the elect that he is against conditional grace. But in his declaring that the offer of salvation should be unrestricted and universal, that is, "the covenant of grace is made with all men", Hodge nearly replaces divine grace, which justifies, with man's faith, which justifies. "If one of the non-elect should believe (though the hypothesis is on various accounts unreasonable) to him that righteousness would be imputed to his salvation. And if one of the elect should not believe, or having believed, should apostatize, he would certainly perish."² The point Hodge wishes to stress is that the individual must have a sincere faith or otherwise he will not receive the promises of the covenant of grace and become a saint. This absolute necessity of individual faith throughout Hodge's theology seems to condition his ideas on both the invisible Church and the visible Church, so that Christian faith, order and witness are treated from the standpoint of private belief and obedience.

This problem of almost conditioning grace upon individual belief partially resulted from Hodge's attempt to distinguish between the nature and the design of the covenant's promises.³

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 472, 364-365. Hodge's parenthesis.

²Hodge, "Beman on the Atonement", BRPR (January, 1845), p. 136. Hodge's parenthesis.

³This distinction is not made in Hodge's formal treatment of "The Promises of the Covenant" in ST, II, pp. 365f, but it is brought out in his discussion on the extent of the Atonement, "Beman on the Atonement", BRPR, (January, 1845), pp. 124-137; ST, II, pp. 544-562.

The promise of justification was determined by the nature of Christ's justifying work which was of sufficient value and suitability to satisfy God's justice for each and every man's guilt. Hodge argued that although the nature of the Atonement was not limited, its design or intent was. "If the end of Christ's mission was salvation, it is not conceivable that he died equally for all, unless he purposed to save all." Christ gave Himself only for the Church. Hodge asserted that because of the sufficient and suitable righteous work of Christ, the covenant's promise of justification and salvation can be offered to all men if they believe, but the purpose of Christ's death and the design of justification is limited to the Church or to those who individually have been imputed with righteousness. Only the individual saint receives the divine pardon and the freedom from his guilt which reconcile him to God for eternity. Thus while the nature of the covenant's promise of justification is available to all men, it is only certain for each saint who has personal faith. Because this promise deals with only the justice of God and the personal guilt of man, Hodge would insist that "justification is instantaneous and complete, as soon as the sinner believes." Perhaps this is the reason he dismissed justification as having anything to do with the relation the saint has with moral character, with moral order or with union with other believers.¹

We may derive a few more conclusions from Hodge's exposition

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 245f, 119f; WL, pp. 119, 124f.

of justification as it affects his idea of the true Church:

1) The true Church is basically an aggregate of individually elected saints who each have been spiritually imputed with divine righteousness due to Christ's work. 2) The Church has no community of nature, therefore it has no guilt of its own and there is no justification to be offered for humanity or for any visible, historical society. It seems that the visible Church live(s) under the covenant of works and not the covenant of grace. 3) As there is almost a dualistic Nestorian view of Christ's divinity and humanity, so too there seems to be an eternal spiritual righteousness of the Church conceived separately from its temporal, natural life. 4) With the covenant of redemption being founded and fulfilled separately from the covenant of grace and with Christ merely the federal Mediator of the latter, which depends ultimately upon the Holy Spirit and the faith of the individual, it seems as if the Body of Christ is added, believer by believer, to its abstract Head. 5) As the Church does not ontologically participate in Christ's Incarnation and Atonement, but is only federally represented in such, her members have no continuity or corporateness in their justification. 6) As the condition of faith and the promise of justification pertain only to the individual's spiritual relationship to the justice of God, so Hodge can contend that the character of the true Church can be seen in the spiritual character of the individual saint.

The Saint is Sanctified by Christ's Spirit

When Hodge says that the Church consists of saints "sanctified by Christ", he is declaring that the true Church must be holy, "not merely because her founder, her doctrine, her institutions are holy, but because her members are personally holy."¹ The indwelling of the Holy Spirit produces this personal holiness and the saint's sanctifying faith.

We have already seen in Hodge's doctrines of sin and regeneration that because sinners are imputed with the penalty of Adam's failure to keep the covenant of works, each individual suffers from pollution, is unable to perform any holy act, and thus cannot regain the holy image of God. Those not of the true Church are unregenerated, left with the inability to discern the things of the Spirit, and subject to a covenant of works. But the regenerated partner of the covenant of grace is given the Holy Spirit and is infused with "new habits of grace".

The first of these habits is living faith, "a faith which works by love and purifies the heart." The elected saint's exercise of this faith, as supernaturally influenced by the Holy Spirit, is the necessary first step in the process of sanctification. Because dead faith does not fulfill the conditions of the covenant of grace, it places the individual outside the true Church and brings

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 250f, 265f. Unless otherwise designated, this section on sanctification is derived from these works of Hodge: ST, III, pp. 213-258; WL, pp. 171-238; "Sanctified by faith that is in me", "Growth in Grace", PS, pp. 147-149, 150-155, 166-168.

forth spiritual death. Hodge was not altogether clear on the role of faith in the process of sanctification, but it seems that faith initiates sanctification and sanctification promotes faith. Individual faith is prior to sanctification, because it is the necessary act the believer must experience before he can be imputed with the benefits of Christ's fulfilled covenant of redemption.

But Hodge does not set sanctification of the saint prior to his justification, for the individual imputation of Christ's righteous satisfaction of God's justice is the "preliminary condition of sanctification". It is only when delivered from the law and its curse of guilt that the believer is brought under the influence of God's grace and is able to produce good fruits. When Christ carried out the covenant of redemption, he secured the promise of the Holy Spirit for those whom God had selected to be saints, His Church. "But as with God there are no distinctions of time, Christ was slain from the foundation of the world, and his death availed as fully for the salvation of those" before his Incarnation, thus "the Spirit was given to the people of God from the beginning." Although this is Hodge's way of placing justification before sanctification, this abstract relationship tends to remove the justification and sanctification of Christ's life and work from any historical significance. Does this mean that the true Church's sanctification has no meaning within time and space? This appears to be what Hodge believes when he dismisses Christ's Incarnation as the ontological foundation of the Christian life or the Church.¹

¹Hodge, "What is Christianity?", BRPR (January, 1860), pp.155f; "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 183f; ST, III, pp. 204f.

However, Hodge does write that the true believer partakes of the life of Christ by the indwelling of His Spirit. He then describes this inward work of the Holy Spirit's sanctification of the individual saint as the supernatural effect on the "interior life of the mind" so as to cause "the removing more and more the principles of evil (pollution) still infecting our nature and destroying their power; and secondly, the growth of the principle of spiritual life until it controls the thoughts, feelings, and acts, and brings the soul into conformity to the image of Christ." Thus sanctification in Hodge's thought did not mean the saint's real partaking of Christ's life, but meant the Holy Spirit's changing of the mental character of the saint so that each true believer could better apprehend the "doctrines of the Bible" and be influenced by the glory of "things unseen and eternal." Hodge does contend that the doctrine of sanctification is founded on Christ's substitution for the sinner united to Him in faith, but this substitution is one of judicial representation and the union is not one of ontological incorporation into Christ's sanctified Humanity.¹ It appears that Hodge has a dualism in the noetic and the ontic character of the true Church when he designates Christ's sanctifying work as a scriptural "object" of faith, and when he accepts only the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, and not also the reality of Christ's sanctified being. Nevertheless Hodge argued that by the Spirit dwelling in the believer, Christ dwells in each saint as his personal prophet, priest and king. Because the Spirit dwells

¹Hodge, ST, II, pp. 522f.

in all saints, Hodge can say that Christ dwells in the collective Church diffusing His spiritual life to all members, making them fruitful "every part according to its measure."

The sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit is given only to the elect, those of the true Church and not of the world. However, according to divine favor, it is exercised more in one saint than in another, although all true believers are promised that they will be progressively brought toward the holy image of Christ, if they continue to heed the graces of the Holy Spirit. This is why Hodge urges that the exercises of spiritual life must be maintained by each saint so he may not provoke the Spirit to withdraw from him, and may grow in grace. The believer must exercise "submission, confidence, self-denial, patience, and meekness, as well as faith, hope, and love" in order to grow in holiness. "Every pious emotion strengthens the principle of piety, and leaves the soul permanently better." Herein lies one of Hodge's main reasons for the existence of some sort of Church society on earth and the observance of the sacraments. The spiritual life of the individual soul is edified and developed through acts of piety which are enhanced by fellowship with other saints who have similar devotional interests. Although the sanctification of the saint might be promoted, it is not due to visible fellowships, or to any outward act of good works. It is exclusively the gracious, supernatural work of the Holy Spirit influencing the subjective thought and feeling of the individual true believer.

However, Hodge also insisted that the soul is active and co-operates in this spiritual sanctifying process by performing good works, which he calls the "fruits of sanctification" that indicate who are of the true Church. By good works, Hodge meant those "works which both in the matter of them, and in the design and motives of the agent, (are) what the law requires." Not even a saint's best works are perfect, but if his motive in performing them is to love God, to obey his will, to honor Christ, or to promote his spiritual kingdom, then they can be called sanctifying fruits of the Spirit. Those outside the true Church might perform good works of civil justice and mercy in their social relations, but as with saints these are merely the fruits of right moral feeling which all people have by the law, being innate to their human constitution.

As we have seen, Hodge held that the Holy Spirit wrought religious feelings only in the mind of the elected saint. But he contended, however, that these holy affections and their accompanying good works must be regulated by the Biblical principles of conduct. The Bible does not command "in detail everything which the people of God are bound to do," but it does give general principles such as requiring "children to obey their parents, citizens the magistrate, and believers to hear the (visible) Church", and limiting the authority of parents, magistrate, and the Church to only those obligations commanded by God. Hodge insisted that the "matter" of good works must follow this principle: "nothing is sin but what the Bible forbids, and nothing is morally obligatory but what the

Bible enjoins."¹ The question could be raised whether Hodge really meant that the parent, the visible Church or the magistrate could exercise this principle of sanctifying works unless they were elected saints, because he has already argued that only regenerated saints possess religious feelings which motivate them to act according to God's will. He believed that the Holy Spirit worked out sanctification on the mind of the believer rendering him spiritually motivated with the right interpretation of the biblical principle of good works. With these views, it seems that Hodge is saying that sanctification possibly could be limited to the individual's acts of piety and devotion in isolation from the visible Church or human society.

However, Hodge insists that "growth in grace is not promoted by a life of seclusion and asceticism." The saint's religion is in vain if his sanctifying exercises are related only to his own salvation. The health of the soul can only be maintained or promoted if the works of love toward God include justice and benevolence towards men. Good works, both inwardly religious and

¹This was the same principle Southern Presbyterians employed in their defense of slavery and jure divino Presbyterian polity. But Hodge viewed this as a "general" principle which was to leave room for wide discretion in its pragmatic application. Although he denies that this leads to "expediency" as a rule of Christian discipline, he feels free to use this principle to defend and to condemn those ecclesiastical organizational methods, those terms of church membership, or those civil laws with which he agrees or disagrees. He viewed it as a test of piety, but insisted that no man is bound to the duty of making himself perfect. Cf. Hodge, Lecture, "The Law of God" (n.d.), "Lecture Notes 1824-1849", MS A1. Alc. at P.T.S.; Sermon No. 21, "Principles of duty revealed in the Bible" (n.d.), "Sermons, New Series, 1-47", MS H6624sf at P.T.S.; These points are discussed more fully throughout our Section II.

outwardly moral are not meritorious, but Hodge insists that God will reward every person according to, although not on account of, his works. Those under the law will be dealt with on the principles of the law, but the saint is under grace and will be made perfectly sanctified in the future life. Even though "justification is instantaneous and complete, as soon as the sinner believes," his sanctification only progressively makes him holy. Therefore each saint must continue to obey the law, confess his sins and ask for forgiveness, because he has not conformed to the image of God and still has sin cleaving to him.¹

The full significance of this view of sanctification, as it determines Hodge's idea of the true Church, will be more evident in his exposition of holiness as an attribute of the Church. But we may conclude from the above that by defining the true Church in terms of a saint who must be "sanctified by Christ", Hodge viewed the Church as a collection of holy, individual believers whose sanctified life is not due to Christ's obedience and fulfilling the

¹Hodge refuted Charles Finney and other Arminian contemporaries who proposed that individuals could complete their sanctification by perfect obedience to the law in this life. Some of these men used revival tactics and Samuel Hopkins' theory of "disinterested benevolence" to promote aggressive voluntary societies that would attack the evils of society (alcohol, slavery, etc.). This in turn gave rise to the expectancy that the millenium was at hand. Hodge abhorred all these on the ground that they depended on worldly circumstances and on the success of human schemes of outward reformation. He insisted that God's providential law rules history and the world and that only his grace (the Holy Spirit) could progressively sanctify the inward mind of the believer. Hodge failed to use the point that while man is not yet sanctified, he is already sanctified in Christ who perfectly obeyed the law. This could have given Hodge a more socially conscious view of the Gospel's promise of sanctification. Cf. Hodge, Sermons No. 21 and No. 36, "Sermons, New Series, 1-47", MS H6624sf at P.T.S.; ST, III, pp. 8f, 255f.

law, but to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The nature of the Church's sanctification begins and will end as the Holy Spirit eradicates the evil and restores God's image within the mind of each true believer. The design of the Church's life is the spiritual edification and eventual perfection of its members. The Church displays this progressive sanctification by its individual saints performing pious, good works. It promotes the growth in grace by using the divinely established "means" of word, sacraments and prayer, but neither these means nor visible fellowships have any sanctifying effect other than that the Holy Spirit "sometimes" uses them to enhance the devotional life of the saints. If the true Church's sanctified life was merely the witness of the changing spiritual relationship that its individual members had with God, without also including the witness of a new creation ontologically established in the being of Christ, its life need not involve a missionary responsibility to the world's political, social and economic communities. Because Hodge argues that God's providence and the universal consciousness of the law insure the efficient natural operation of moral obligations throughout the world, and because he saw sanctification as merely the supernatural operation of the Spirit on the inward life of the believers which caused them to produce pious, good fruits, it would seem that the Church's sanctified life is concerned not with society's problems and activities, but with the individual saint's spiritual edification

and eternal destiny; not with moral law, but with the spiritual law; not with nature, but with grace.¹

The Saint Is Consecrated to God

"When... it is said that the Church consists of saints, the meaning is not that it consists of all who are externally consecrated to God, irrespective of their moral character, but that it consists of true Christians or sincere believers." This consecration, argued Hodge, does not refer to the external relations and privileges, such as the Hebrews had, but to the internal character of each saint.²

To be a sincere believer so as to have access to God, the individual must be reconciled to God, that is, he has to be at peace with God so as to gain His fellowship and spiritual blessings. This is accomplished by Christ, Who delivers the sinner from the penalty for disobedience to the law. Reconciliation is acquired through the Holy Spirit Who changes the saint's inward character so that he can sincerely believe in Christ. It will not be

¹Hodge, ST, I, pp. 614f; II, pp. 260f; III, pp. 259f; "Beecher's Great Conflict", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 119f. This dualism is somewhat reflected in one of Hodge's sermons dedicating a new church building. "The institutions of religion ...lie at the foundation of all social order and well being.... But, brethren, it is not primarily for the sake of the social or civil blessings inseparably connected with the institutions of Christianity, that this house has been erected, but ...for the worship and glory of Christ and the spiritual edification and salvation of yourselves and children." We must understand that Hodge admitted that the Church denominations or particular local churches were important for teaching the Gospel's doctrines and instructing the moral consciences of men. However, the true Church's very existence and life were not absolutely dependent on these institutions either in respect to their nature or mission. Hodge, Sermon, "Christian Brethren" (n.d., n.p.); "Miscellaneous talks and sermons for baptisms, ordinations, funerals, etc." MS H6624mj at P.T.S.

²Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 251.

necessary to explain what Hodge meant by this, as it is a repetition of our preceding sections, but we shall just mention a few of the consequences of this reconciliation and consecration.¹

The consequences of the Church are first that the saint, who has the gift of the reconciling Holy Spirit, can renounce himself and the world. He has been separated from the evil principle of his nature, his indolence, his passions, his love of the world, his fear of man, his desire of wealth and applause. He has surrendered and consecrated his whole being to God.² His election and his faithful obedience have set him apart as a saint and as one of God's reconciled people. All individuals in every country who have acquired this access to God, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit, Hodge declares to be "fellow-citizens of the saints; members of the family of God, constituent parts of that temple in which God dwells by his Spirit." The terms of admission have been the same for all. They have all been selected, separated from the world, and consecrated to God and have the right to membership in that body of which Christ is the head. Their relationship to each other is as a communion of consecrated saints, and not that of the old, external, visible theocracy or simply that of the visible Church. They are a sacred people, set apart by God to be his true Church, which as such

¹One significant point to be noted is that Hodge designates Christ's work of reconciliation was solely "to satisfy God's justice" and "not to reform men", "not to influence human conduct, or display the divine character for the sake of the moral effect of that exhibition." Hodge assigns only to the Holy Spirit the work of reconciling man to God. Hodge, R₂, pp. 109-112, ST, II, pp. 514-515.

²Hodge, "Fidelity in the Service of God", PS, pp. 250f.

cannot be lawfully controlled by any visible society or state.¹

Hodge argued that reconciliation and consecration affect essentially the individual saint's relationship to God and that it is produced in his mind not by the inward fellowship with other saints, but by the Holy Spirit. However, he also said that the results of these supernatural acts, accomplished through Christ and by the Holy Spirit, remove the mutual enmity between God's elected individuals, unites them in one harmonious body and draws them closer to God as his common children, the communion of saints, the true Church. But there is an evident void in Hodge's thought of the consecrated saints being sent out by God into the world as Christ's reconciling community, which shares Christ's labors of healing the enmities of mankind.

The True Church Consists of the Invisible Communion of Saints

"If a man is not justified, sanctified, and consecrated to God," argued Hodge, "he is not a saint, and therefore does not belong to the Church, which is the communion of saints."² But Hodge declared that there are such men who are saints, and as saints they have "certain things in common" which give rise to a communion or bond between them. Arguing against the idea that an external bond (e.g. external organization or external community) is necessary for the saints to have communion so as to be called the true Church,

¹Hodge, E, pp. 128-152.

²Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 251.

Hodge wrote:

As to the bond by which the saints are united so as to become a church, it cannot be anything external, because that may and always does unite those who are not saints. The bond, whatever it is, must be peculiar to the saints; it must be something to which their justification, sanctification, and access to God are due. This can be nothing less than their relation to Christ. It is in virtue of union with him that men become saints, or are justified, sanctified, and brought nigh to God. They are one body in Jesus Christ. The bond of union between Christ and his people is the Holy Spirit, who dwells in him and in them. He is the head, they are the members of his body, the Church, which is one body, because pervaded and animated by one Spirit. The proximate and essential bond of union between the saints, that which gives rise to their communion, and makes them the Church or body¹ of Christ, is, therefore, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

In order to expound Hodge's idea of the true Church as the communion of saints, we need not repeat what he meant by the individual being justified, sanctified and consecrated to God. Instead we should see why he insists that the bond of communion must be invisible. This can be understood in terms of how all saints "sustain a common relation to Christ" and what common effects they experience from the indwelling of the same Spirit.²

Relation to Christ

Charles Hodge contended that a saint must be in union with Christ in order to be a member of His Body, and all saints thus united to Christ make up His Church. "This union is partly federal

¹Ibid.

²Hodge, "The Communion of Saints", PS, pp. 233f. The word "common" is not to be confused with the word "corporate", because Hodge meant that these benefits were experienced similarly by each and all the saints, and not that they belong to their communion.

established in the councils of eternity; partly vital by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; and partly voluntary and conscious by faith."¹ Admitting that this union with Christ is "mysterious" and cannot be comprehended, Hodge argued, however, that its nature and effects are clearly revealed.² The nature of this essential union with Christ, which forms the invisible communion of the saints, can be described as representative, supernatural, and vital.

Christ is the federal head of all true believers. He represented them in the councils of eternity when the covenant of redemption was formed. He acted for all saints when He fulfilled that covenant's conditions. And as the representative head of His inherited Church, Christ mediates the covenant of grace between God and the saint. Hodge insisted that Christ's representation was not for all people, but just for those members of His true Church. "He was therefore the federal head, not of the human race, but of those given to Him by the Father. And, therefore, his work, so far as its main design is concerned, was for them alone. Whatever reference it had for others was subordinate and incidental."³ All saints have the same unique, federal relationship to Christ,

¹Hodge, ST, II, p. 396.; Hodge, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), p. 26.

²Hodge, WL, pp. 225f; E, pp. 337, 344, 347, 351.

³Hodge, ST, II, p. 551. Hodge also denied that any of the visible churches, "or all of them collectively, constitute the Church for which Christ died; in which He dwells by his Spirit". Hodge, ST, I, p. 135.



and thus, they all partake of the benefits of His redemption. Their common relationship to Christ is the same as the head is to the body, or the vine is to the branches. The body or branches can live only when connected to the head or the vine. Therefore, the saints' relationship or union only arises when each member individually participates in the life of Christ. Hodge criticized Calvin for saying that the members are partakers of the substance of Christ's body.¹ We are not one flesh with Christ, insisted Hodge, but we do have the same spiritual life of Christ communicated to us through the Holy Spirit. Our union or reconciliation with God was not performed by Christ's Incarnation, because the union "arises from our participation of Christ's body....and not his taking our flesh and blood."² Although Christ represented the Church, the Church cannot represent Christ, because if the Church were the theanthropic life of Christ, the life of God and the life of man would be identical.³ Thus Hodge can say that the essential communion of saints or the true Church cannot be the visible Church.

Nevertheless, because Hodge held that the saints' union can be described as supernatural, we can say that Christ always dwells

¹Hodge, E, pp. 340f.

²Ibid.; ST, II, p. 381. Hodge's underlining. This same thought is reflected in Hodge's view of the Eucharist as a spiritual memorial and not as the real presence of Christ.

³Hodge, E, p. 343.

in his Church. His life was "temporary in person and continuous in his Spirit."¹ His Spirit dwells in all saints so that the "life of Christ is diffused through all members of his mystical body making them one body in Him; having a common life with their common head."² But Hodge is also quick to point out that "it is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, that constitutes the Church's body."³ The Church does not exist in Christ's human person, but in His Spirit which was given without measure to Him as Head of the Church and which He has sent to all those elected by God to be true believers. Each of these true believers first has to be baptized by the Holy Spirit before he can be united to Christ.⁴ However, since all saints are baptized by the one Spirit, they all have a similar spiritual union with Christ. Their invisible communion then is an internal, spiritual bond of union resulting from the same Spirit dwelling in each saint, rendering them all "spiritual-minded" and "sincere believers."⁵

This representative and supernatural union, Hodge argued, is true of sincere believers alone. "Faith...is the bond of our union with Christ."⁶ The saints might be federally and supernaturally

¹Ibid., p. 142.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 228.

³Hodge, E, p. 87. Our underlining.

⁴This is not the same as the visible Church's sacrament of baptism. Hodge, IC, p. 254.

⁵Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 262; IC, pp. 254f.

⁶Hodge, WL, p. 229.

united to Christ, but unless they fulfill the stipulations of the covenant of grace by believing in Christ, they cannot be united to Him and become members of His true Church.¹ As we have seen, faith, in Hodge's thought, is always a personal act of union with Christ and is not conditioned by a corporate life with the visible Church. Faith is founded on the inward testimony of God's spirit in the mind of each man.² But each saint has in common with other saints the same object of faith (Christ) and the same inward testimony. Therefore, Hodge argues that they have a spiritual bond which can be described as a vital union of faith in Christ.

The more intimate the union with Christ, the more intimate the communion of saints. The more conscious we are of our union with Christ, the more conscious we shall be of our communion with his people. As the union between Christ and his people is a vital one, more intimate than any other, so the bond which unites saints is the most intimate of all bonds.³

This may be the reason why Hodge dismisses any visible bond as necessary for the communion of saints or as essential to the true Church. Personal faith, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the federal representation of Christ are the only real bonds creating communion. To Hodge, these are all basically individual, internal and invisible.

Effects of the Common Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

With regard to the effect of the common indwelling of the Holy Spirit among all saints, Hodge says it produces a common spiritual

¹As we have noticed earlier, Hodge always qualifies this voluntary act of faith as a condition for church membership, by such phrases as "so far as adults are concerned." Hodge, ST, III, p.104; E, p. 185.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 67.

³Hodge, PS, p. 234.

character or life and a common eternal destiny.¹ What he meant by the common character of all saints has been seen in his definition of the saint. But even though he says that the spiritual benefits imputed from Christ, the religious faith and the religious experiences "of one Christian is the same as that of all others," he admits that there is a "sympathy and congeniality" in their spiritual communion.² The true Church is the "fulness of Christ", not because it fills His life, but because He fills the Church's life with His Holy Spirit. He has made his people "one with him and one among themselves", because the Spirit which filled His life now fills each of their lives, thereby creating among them a community, not of visible substance, but of spiritual affections.³

To Hodge, this community of spiritual affections is evidenced by various fruits of holiness and a common principle of spiritual power, both of which the saints must always have to be recognizable as members of the true Church. In other words, Hodge argued that the Head through the Spirit always diffuses to every real member of the body spiritual life and strength or spiritual gifts and the power to use their gifts. The Church has but "one soul", but it also has a multiplicity of members, each of whom is granted a function of his own. Both the gifts and their use are assigned to different individuals by the will of the "soul" or Holy Spirit and not according

¹Ibid.; WL, p. 227; R₂, pp. 290-295; I C, pp. 252-263; E, pp. 87-92, 239-346, 344-351; ST, III, pp. 104, 113, 127, 227-231.

²Hodge, PS, p. 234.

³Hodge, E, p. 88; WL, p. 227.

to the merits or will of the members. All members should accept their unique gifts and manifest them for the good of the whole body. The diversity of members and their gifts is essential to spiritual communion, for only when they are collected together do they help edify and perfect the other saints.

Hodge says that "the spiritual growth in every individual believer" is dependent upon his union with the mystical body of Christ, because the Holy Spirit uses the fruits of holiness of other saints as the channels of communicating His sanctifying influence to each believer. The most important spiritual gift to be used for the whole is the ministry. "It is...through the ministry of the word that the divine influence flows from Christ the Head to all the members of his body, so that where the ministry fails the divine influence fails." The Church cannot be sustained or grow without those divinely appointed channels of apostles and prophets, who revealed the truth (the Bible), and of evangelists, pastors and teachers, who preach the truth, for "it is only (so far as adults are concerned) in connection with the truth, as thus revealed and preached, that the Holy Ghost is communicated." Hence it appears that Hodge limits the dispensing of truth and the edification of the true Church to the office of the ministry.¹

¹Hodge, E, pp. 245f, 223-230. Hodge said that the greatest and most comprehensive mission of churches was to teach the divine truths of the Bible. "The knowledge of the truth is therefore a preliminary condition to the experience of this divine influence (Holy Spirit). This knowledge the Spirit does not communicate. He has revealed it in the Word (the Bible). It is the business of the Church to make it known. The office of the Church and that of the Spirit are therefore perfectly distinct." Hodge, The Teaching Office of the

But this is contrary to Hodge's doctrines of election and the Holy Spirit. For him it was conceivable theoretically that any person (especially infants) who had been elected to be a saint could receive the regenerating and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit apart from the written or preached truth. The Holy Spirit is a "personal, voluntary agent acting with the truth or without it, as He pleases." However the saint's spiritual experiences (received through prayer or otherwise) are "to be judged by the written Word as the only infallible rule of faith or practice" before he can decide whether these are true or false.¹ Nevertheless, Hodge believed that the Holy Spirit ordinarily chooses to act in conjunction with the ministry of the Word. "Even a regenerated soul without any truth before it, would be in blank darkness....The Bible, therefore, is essential to the conscious existence of the divine life in the soul and to all its rational exercises." The Word of God, when spiritually discerned, calls forth the "holy thoughts, feelings, purposes and acts" of the saint.² The Bible "contains the truths by which the soul is sanctified, and it conveys to the mind the intellectual knowledge of those truths." The work of the Holy Spirit

Contd.]

Church (Sermon for Board of Foreign Missions at University Place Church, New York City, May 7, 1848), (New York: Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1882), pp. 2-3.

¹Hodge, ST, III, pp. 482-485.

²Ibid., pp. 478-479. Our underlining.

(apart from the person of Christ) is "to open the eyes, and to soften the heart" of the individual so as to cause the soul to accept and act upon these rational, Biblical truths.¹

Hence, Hodge stressed the priority of ministerial gifts to all others in the community of spiritual life. Ministers teach those Biblical doctrines which, when spiritually apprehended by saints, call forth their latent spiritual gifts. Therefore, according to Hodge's logic, the ministry of the Word plays an important role in enhancing each saint's spiritual consciousness. The Holy Spirit then induces the saints to exercise and share their gifts in a congenial, sympathetic manner, so as to edify each other's spiritual growth and communion.

If a saint lacks spiritual gifts, he should not be discontented with his situation. So too, the man who is more favored with gifts should not be proud, because both have been ordained by God to their particular position in the true Church. Hodge applied this principle to explain the existence of poverty which was to be accepted as necessary for the good of the whole.² This was partially based on his thought that property was divinely entrusted by natural law to individuals who were to give of their possessions as the Holy Spirit directed their consciences. Therefore the community of religious affections could be expressed

in the community of goods, as far as is best in the present state of the world; that is so far as it does not destroy the motive to individual exertion,

¹Ibid., p. 477.

²Hodge, I C, p. 258.

and so far as is consistent with that accumulation of capital, and division of labor which are best suited to the present condition of men.¹

Nevertheless, Hodge insisted that gifted saints should sympathize and honor other saints who lack spiritual gifts because the true Church is by its nature really one body with a common spiritual life and consciousness. If one member rejoices or suffers, all members rejoice or suffer with him. If members do not sympathize with their fellow members, this is proof that they do not belong to the body of Christ.² Besides, "every act by which we benefit others, makes ourselves better and happier...and will increase our happiness in heaven."³

Hodge almost considered the saint's sharing of religious affections as exclusively within their communion. Members should love whom Christ loves, and hate what Christ hates.⁴ The Holy Spirit which binds Christ and His people, one Christian to another, "must determine the nature of the unity of the Church, and all its legitimate or normal manifestations." All men have a just, moral

¹Hodge, PS, p. 234. Hodge argues that if the poor saints become discontented and tend to Communism, teach "them that this is not the only life that the soul is immortal, and that men will be rewarded or punished in the world to come according to their character and conduct in the present life....(Tell) them to believe that there is a divine providence over the affairs of the world." Hodge, ST, III, p. 433-434. To Hodge all activities and materials of this world and its people were founded on natural law (i.e. will of God and innate sense of justice in man).

²Hodge, IC, p. 261; PS, p. 235.

³Hodge, Sermon No. 10, "Sermons, New Series, 1-47", MS H6624sf at P.T.S.

⁴Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 263.

character and the Holy Spirit encourages them to use their social virtues. Christians should act benevolently toward all mankind, but their spiritual love for other Christians is due to their unique indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Hodge considered this to be similar to Christ's special love for His Church and His benevolent love for all mankind. The saints, by thus having this mutual love and Holy Spirit, could recognize each other as Christians and join in worship, prayer and discipline in order to enhance each others' gifts and the edification of the whole. "A solitary Christian, is but half a Christian. There are elements of spiritual life which can only be brought into action in organic union with his fellow Christians."¹

For Hodge, the other effect of the saints' union with Christ due to the indwelling of the same Holy Spirit was their common eternal destiny. All saints are promised holiness and salvation. This destiny is unique to them as individual members of the true Church. "It is not a community or society, as such, that is redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, and saved. Persons, and not communities, are the subjects of these blessings."² However, if the true Church, as Hodge believes, is the invisible communion of individual saints, then it can be said to have a common goal in

¹Hodge, Sermon, "Unity of the Church", n.d., MS H6624by at P.T.S. Cf. Hodge, WL, p. 215. It should be noted that Hodge saw Christ's and the Church's benevolent love for mankind primarily in terms of individual relationships. Thus he seems to regard the community of affection among saints as directed more toward enhancing the spiritual fruits of the individual than toward producing fruits of the body.

²Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 282.

this life to be perfected in the life to come. The true Church's goal included complete unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God and perfect holiness.¹

Hodge started out by saying that unity had no reference "to the confluence of nations from all parts of the earth, but to the body of Christ, the company of saints." Therefore unity of faith is the unique end which all saints alone are to attain. Personal faith is a form, but not an element of knowledge. "A state of mind (in an individual) which includes the apprehension of his (Christ's) glory, the appropriation of his love, as well as confidence and devotion... is in itself eternal life." When all the saints of the communion have come to the same state of mind, the true Church has reached its goal. The striving for this unity is that which all saints share. Although they are now united to Christ in faith, they are not yet perfectly united to Him. Therefore, "unity is a matter of degrees" between saints and should not be assumed by outward bonds (e.g. membership in the visible Church). The saints' perfect unity of faith must wait until the future.

Hodge contended that because the only object of faith is Christ, then the Church can persevere in obtaining perfect knowledge of Him. When all saints perfectly know Christ, they become "like" Christ. Therefore, "perfect knowledge is perfect holiness." When a person, who must be holy to belong to the true Church, is made perfectly holy, he has reached the end of his spiritual development.

¹Unless otherwise designated, the following is drawn from Hodge, E, pp. 230-244.

When the true Church is made perfect, it has reached the end of its development and stands complete in glory with perfect knowledge and perfect holiness, which are present in "Christ as the model".

The Bible, however, never represents the consummation of the church as occurring in this life. Christ gave himself for the church that he might present it to himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle, but this presentation is not to take place until he comes a second time to be glorified in the saints and admired in all them that believe.¹

As all saints are bound to the same goal of conforming to Christ, so in the present life they must strive to grow toward a holy perfection. "Christ appointed the ministry to bring the Church to that end." Therefore, Hodge insists that the Church must dismiss error which is evil and sinful.² But because holiness implied knowledge of the truth, a saint or group of saints who live holy lives furnishes "one of the surest of the criteria of truth." Therefore, the goal of growing up "unto" Christ's knowledge and holiness ought to be evidenced in the lives of all saints and

¹Ibid., pp. 235-236. For this reason Hodge treated the premillennarian movement very severely because of its "essential earthly character". He was also skeptical of the Millerites' or Seventh-Day Adventists' version, because he thought that the consummation of the Church was to take place after a period of "great apostasy", which had not yet occurred. Hodge believed that there had always been some people who had sincerely believed in Christ and thus constituted His true Kingdom. So he was opposed to the view that "the Kingdom of Christ is yet future and is not to be inaugurated until his second coming. This is to confound its consummation with its commencement." Hodge, ST, III, pp. 855-868; I C, pp. 326f.

²Herein lies the basis for the polemic nature of Hodge's theology, his acute Biblicism and his insistence that all ordained Presbyterian ministers must subscribe to the essential doctrines in the American version of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1867), pp. 506f; "Adoption of the Confession of Faith", BRPR (October, 1858), pp. 669-692; A Dissertation on the Importance of Biblical Literature (Trenton, N.J.: G. Sherman, 1822), pp. 39-43; ST, I, pp. 153f.

especially the clergy, whose doctrines and religious character have the greatest influence in the church and society.¹

In short, Hodge declared,

The Church, united as one body by the divine influence flowing from Christ its head through appropriate channels (the Bible and the ministry), and distributed to every member (the saints) according to his peculiar capacity and function, continually advances toward perfection.²

This perfection, as the unity of faith and knowledge of Christ and as perfect holiness, is the common eternal destiny of those united to Christ. Even though Hodge insisted upon individual salvation, he declared that the true Church as the invisible communion of saints will participate in Christ's glory in heaven. Therefore Hodge's idea of the true Church can be described as the invisible communion of those individual saints united to Christ by the common indwelling of the Holy Spirit through personal faith, so as to partake of the same benefits of Christ's work and be promised the same eternal salvation. Thus all saints have a common life and a common destiny. Hodge would want to add the following:

It is to degrade and destroy the gospel to apply this description of the Church as the Body of Christ, to the mass of nominal Christians, the visible Church, which consists of all sorts of men,...for no such visible society is animated by His Spirit, is partaker of his life, and heir of his glory.... The Church, therefore, in its true idea or essential nature, is not a visible society, but the company of faithful men - the coetus sanctorum, or the communion of saints.... The saints may exist, they may have communion, the Church may continue under any external³ organization, or without any visible organization whatever.

¹Hodge, Dissertation on ... Biblical Literature, pp. 39-40.

²Hodge, E, p. 244.

³Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 263, 250; (July, 1853), p. 343.

The True Church as a Sphere of Christ's Kingdom

Besides representing the idea of the true Church in terms of the communion of saints and the body of Christ, Hodge sometimes used the descriptions: "temple of God", "family of God", "flock of Christ", "bride of Christ" and "kingdom of Christ."¹ It is not necessary for us to follow Hodge's discourse on each of these, as they are essentially a repetition of the above. However, it is important to see in what way he related the true Church to the Kingly rule of Christ.

Hodge described the Kingship of Christ as setting forth two "spheres" in which Christ exercises all divine power and absolute royal authority. The first of these was the "kingdom of power", which defined the nature in which "Christ is the God of providence." Hodge spoke of this Kingdom as Christ's "mediatorial government of the universe." If he could say that this was inaugurated at Christ's Coming, one would think that all mankind are now subjects of the Grace of God in Christ. But such is not Hodge's meaning. Instead he viewed Christ's universal authority as being exercised to control providence "for the benefit of his (true) Church." That is, Christ overrules all the affairs of nations and of individuals and directs all events for the spiritual life of his elect subjects.²

Christ's Kingship in respect to the rest of the world is in

¹Hodge, R, pp. 193-195; E, pp. 147-154, 315-347; I C, pp. 59f, 78f, 329f; A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), pp. 170f; ST, II, pp. 599f; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 263f; (July, 1853), pp. 385f.

²Hodge, ST, II, pp. 597-601; ST, I, pp. 501f.

terms of governing the universe and all its creatures by means of natural and moral laws, or what Hodge has earlier called "common grace". This included all natural and moral events which themselves "are due to forces inherent in the creature, whether physical or mental in the production and control of which God exercises no other power than that which is constant and universal."¹ We remember that Hodge believed that all men had an innate sense of justice and thus knew that they were morally obligated to obey God's will to perform natural, social and political duties.² If this is the case, Christ exercises no other power in His reign over those not elected to be His Church than the providential power of law and justice. That is, Christ does not administer His redeeming love to all people and communities. Nor does He rule them and the events of the world with His forgiveness and mercy. Instead this is seen in the second sphere in which Christ establishes His Kingship.

Hodge declared that Christ's second Kingdom is one of grace. In this Christ has two realms - one is His spiritual Kingdom composed of individual true believers (the invisible Church), and the other is His visible Kingdom composed of professing Christians (the visible Church). "The kingdom of Christ (in the first aspect), is a purely spiritual community, consisting of those truly and inwardly his people." As was the case when he expounded the qualifying

¹Hodge, "Introduction", James B. Ramsay, The Spiritual Kingdom: An Exposition of the First Chapters of the Book of the Revelation (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1873), p. ix. Hodge, ST, I, pp. 614f.

²Hodge, ST, I, pp. 405, 421.

descriptions of a saint, Hodge again resorts to private, spiritual relationships with Christ in speaking of the terms of admission to the kingdom. Not external profession, not performance of sacraments, not membership in the visible Church, but personal, sincere faith and true repentance are the terms. Hodge does not start with the life of the kingdom of which those who believe will share. Instead he begins with what the individual must do. This depends upon "the state of his heart" and not on his relations with the world or even with other Christians! Then Hodge lists the "laws of this kingdom". All of these are performed through personal faith and piety. Hodge saw as the first and great end of spiritual life securing "the reign of Christ in our own souls", and then he added bringing "others to call him Lord."¹ When Hodge says that "the special law of Christ's kingdom is that its members should love one another," he fails to say that Christians should also have the same love and care for others outside the true Church. For Hodge, these pious fruits are necessary so that Christians can recognize who are real members of the true Church and can treat each other as having the same individual privileges and blessings.²

Even though Hodge considered the Holy Spirit to be the effectual working agent in securing this Kingdom's constituents, one

¹Hodge, "Thy Kingdom Come" (January 7, 1866), PS, p. 324.

²Hodge declared that the invisible Church can be seen "in the piety in the hearts of the individual members of which the Kingdom is composed." Hodge, Sermon, "The Kingdom of God's dear Son", "Early Sermons, undated", MS H6624e at P.T.S.

still gets the impression that divine Grace is clouded by conditions and laws. Christ's personal Kingship seems to be one of a divine legislator. Hodge does admit that He is "king of every believing soul."¹ But the authority of the actual living and reigning Christ is limited by believers' recognition of His Kingship and the extent to which they obey the laws of this Kingdom. It was in this way that Hodge thought that Christ's Kingdom of Glory was still in the future. That is, there is a time in the future at the end of the world when His royal authority shall be universally and perfectly recognized by all true believers.²

We will examine the second aspect of Christ's Kingdom of Grace, or His "Visible Kingdom", in our third chapter entitled "The Appearance of the Church". But we will mention here that Hodge saw this as a result of two things. First, the "goodness" of true saints "renders itself visible by its outward manifestations." Second, because of a divine precept, saints should "form themselves into churches" for "the promotion of religious objects" that would enhance their religious piety, and not be involved in "the temporal well-being of society."³

However, the true Kingdom of Christ is "spiritual, not only as opposed to secular, but as distinguished from external organization."⁴

¹Hodge, ST, II, p. 601.

²Hodge, PS, p. 323.

³Hodge, ST, II, p. 604.

⁴Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 387.

Therefore, to complete his idea of the true Church's nature, we must look at those attributes, promises and prerogatives which belong only to the true saints and not to organized visible churches.

Chapter II The Idea of the True Church's Attributes, Promises and Prerogatives

Hodge declared that it was absurd to substitute the visible Church for the true invisible Church by transferring the attributes, promises and prerogatives "which belong to true believers, to an organized body of nominal or professed believers." This "is to ascribe to wickedness the character and blessedness of goodness." Because these cannot belong to any visible society, Hodge seems to contend that they must belong to the individual true believer. Therefore, the attributes, promises and prerogatives ascribed to the individual saint are essentially those which belong to the communion of saints or true Church and which influence its life and mission.¹

Attributes of the True Church

The attributes are based on the inward habitation of the Holy Spirit in every true believer. Hodge does not say that these attributes are first possessed by Christ Incarnate and thus "those attributes in which the Church shares through its union and communion with Him."² Instead, he predicated them to the Holy Spirit's influence on saints who in turn determine the essential character of the Church. "The Church is what she is, and all that

¹Hodge, ST, I, p. 138; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 289f, 252f; "Christian Rebuke", PS, pp. 273f. In this last source, Hodge wrote, "as every man is a microcosm, so every believer is an epitome of the Church."

²T.F. Torrance, printed lecture "Doctrine of the Church" (n.d., n.p.), p. 11.

she is" in virtue of the Spirit dwelling in her members. "To this source her holiness, unity and perpetuity, are to be referred, and under these attributes all others are comprehended."¹ Even though Hodge might have considered the Holy Spirit as the source of these attributes, his over-emphasis upon them as belonging to individual saints versus the visible Church almost makes private faith their author. It is significant then that he lists the attributes in this order and grouping, because the inward character of the believer is the foundation upon which the other two attributes depend.

Holiness

"As God is holy, it is necessary that his people should be holy."² Therefore, the life of the Church must be holy or "inwardly pure, that is, its members must be regenerated men, and it must be separated from the world and consecrated to God."³ We have already seen how Hodge discussed these ideas in his definition of the saint, and we should remember that he held that "where the Spirit of God is, there is holiness. If, therefore, the Spirit dwells in the Church, the Church must be holy, not merely nominally, but really; not merely because her founder, her doctrines, her institution are holy, but because her members are personally holy."⁴

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 264.

²Hodge, WL, p. 220.

³Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 265.

⁴Ibid.

Throughout his writings, he describes holiness as a transformation of the heart or the change of the inward character of the believer by this indwelling of the Spirit. Because of this personal holiness, the Church can be called holy, as it is the communion of saints.

Rather than starting with the ground and the end of holiness of the Church in the person of Christ, Hodge prefers to speak of holiness as that necessary state which each saint must possess in order to be a member of Christ's Body. As each saint is individually renewed by the Spirit, he turns his mind away from the things of the world, appropriates the spiritual truth of God and becomes zealous of good works. Keeping in mind what Hodge has said about identifying a saint as "justified by Christ", "sanctified by Christ", and "consecrated to God", one clearly sees why the attribute of the Church as holy must depend on the moral character of its individual members. If the true Church is a communion of saints, Hodge argues, "none but the holy are its true members."¹ To say that saints are holy is to say that the Church is holy.

Because holiness is dependent only on the inward character of the individual believer, Hodge argued that holiness cannot be referred to a visible society. No visible Church, whether it be Presbyterian or otherwise, can be holy, because it is composed of "all sorts of men", and because as an external organization, it cannot be "separated from the world, and devoted to God."² Hodge

¹Ibid., p. 269.

²Ibid., p. 266.

also used this argument against state churches, because their membership "does not in the least depend on the moral character of their members."¹ Neither can the true Church belong to, be controlled by or be related to the state, for the Church is sacred, set apart for God.²

Hodge judged the visible Church as he did the other societies or communities of the world. By empirical observation, he affirmed that the Church is "conspicuous in the beauty of holiness" as a "set of men" or "the epistles of Jesus Christ, known and read of all men." But this visible holiness is not true of the external Church. It is true only of sincere believers. "How unfounded, then, is the objection that the Church, the body of Christ, is a chimera, a Platonic idea, unless it is, in its essential nature, a visible society like the kingdom of England or Republic of Switzerland!"³ In Hodge's mind, there could be no dualism in holiness between idea and appearance as long as the true Church was identical with the true believer, whose individual separation from the world was empirically recognizable by his pious acts. Although faith is an inward quality, it can "be proved by outward evidence."⁴ "If it be asked...., how we are to know whether a given society is to be regarded as a Church; we answer, precisely as we know whether a given individual is to be regarded as a Christian, i.e. by their

¹Ibid., p. 265.

²Hodge, E, p. 152.

³Hodge, "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), pp. 672-3.

⁴Ibid., p. 682.

profession and conduct."¹ Because Hodge has already said we cannot prove a believer's faith as sincere from his profession, then the evidence for proof of his separation from the world has to be by his pious conduct for "by their fruits ye shall know them." Although Hodge held this view of the Church's holiness in polemic with those who argued for sacramental membership with the Church, which he regarded as having heretically limited the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit to the correct fulfillment of a rite initiated by men, he, nevertheless, proposed that holiness can be determined by a certain style or habit of holy living and thus he seems to enclose the Holy Spirit in the sphere of certain human works thought out by men.²

Hodge argued that both the Roman and the Oxford theories of the Church were wrong in that they required nothing beyond outward profession for membership in their church society, whereas evangelical Protestants also demanded a credible evidence of holiness for membership in their churches. He contended that at least this was an assumption (although not a proof) that the professing Christian had the inward virtues of regeneration and sanctification which were usually manifested in spontaneous exercises

¹Ibid., p. 681.

²In his "Introductory Lecture", BRPR (1829), pp. 91-96, Hodge asserts that without personal, experimental piety, the knowledge of divine things and the true Church for that generation of men would disappear.

of piety.¹ Holiness would be denied as an attribute of the Church, if it is ascribed to the visible Church as such, instead of to the character of its individual members. Therefore, because the true Church is holy, it cannot be a visible community. This view led Hodge to assert that some saints are united to Christ only internally. These are members "of the soul, but not of the body - that is, they have faith and love, without external communion with the Church. Others, again, are of the body and not of the soul - that is, they have no true faith."² These latter members are only nominal members who have corrupted the Church. The Church must retain holiness at all times or cease to be the true Church. Therefore, holiness must be attributed to "scattered, unorganized believers". The Church may perpetuate its holiness "in scattered believers, each in his own narrow sphere confessing the truth" and each individually being "known by the fruits of the Spirit manifested in their lives."³

¹William Palmer, A Treatise on the Church of Christ, Third Ed., (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1842), Vol. 1, pp. 112f, 312f. Palmer, against whom Hodge wrote most of his polemics on holiness of the Church, argued that through baptism one is admitted to the true visible Church and that if an individual's reception depended on his professing to be a pious saint, then neither a repentant sinner nor an infant could be a member of the Church. Hodge would argue that because becoming a member of the true invisible Church requires holiness, this meant that the visible Church and visible baptism are not identical to the true Church or true baptism. What Hodge thought should be the requirements for admission to a church society and to the sacraments are treated in our Chapter Four.

²Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 268.

³Hodge, "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p. 677; "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), p. 700.

Part of Hodge's difficulty in dismissing the visible Church as a holy fellowship came through his polemics against the Roman Catholics and Mercersburg's John W. Nevin. He insisted that when the Romanists observed that some of their members were not pure and holy, they found it necessary to say the Church of Rome was holy and its bishops had the "power to render holy" so as to exclude the unpure. This led to a control of the Holy Spirit's graces by the priests who then became "legitimate and absolute masters". Civil and religious liberty was destroyed as the world had to "bow down at their feet" in order to obtain spiritual holiness.¹

Hodge's reaction was similar to that of the Reformers in that he declared that there is "no other priest than Christ."² Because of Christ's atoning work, all true believers have a "liberty of access to God". They need not depend upon the Church or the ministry for holiness, because each is a priest.³ However, Calvin had written, "Now, Christ plays the priestly role, not only to render the Father favorable and propitious toward us by an eternal law of reconciliation, but to receive us as his companions in this great office. For we who are defiled in ourselves, yet are priests in him...."⁴ Hodge did not fully incorporate the latter point within his idea of the priesthood of believers. Instead, he

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), pp. 360f.

²Hodge, "Priesthood of Believers", PS, p. 192.

³Ibid.; Hodge, ST, II, pp. 466f.

⁴John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Bk. II, xv, 6.

dismissed both the individual's and the corporate priesthood's participation in the holy priesthood of Christ, evidently because he thought each saint had to be first pure and holy.¹ He assigns this to the unique agency of the Holy Spirit working in the minds of elected individuals, changing their hearts, and separating them from the world. Thereafter, the priest-believer could have something to offer God, which Hodge sometimes designates as personal faith, "contrite spirit", worship, prayer, or piety, but which he never specifies as the holy obedience of Christ. He was severely critical of Nevin for saying that the true Church partakes of Christ's holy Incarnation, because as Hodge argued, this would deny the dualism of justification and sanctification and also would make the Church, instead of the Holy Spirit, the source of holiness.² Maybe this is the reason why Hodge thought of Christ's holiness only as an object of beauty.³

Although Hodge was attempting to emphasize the freedom of the Holy Spirit to produce holiness in individuals elected by God to be the true Church, the implications from this over-emphasis, without its prior and essential reference to Christ's holiness or to a visible holy fellowship, appears to have far-reaching effects on his idea of the nature and mission of the Church. The Church's

¹Hodge, "Priesthood of Believers", PS, pp. 192, 194f.

²Hodge, ST, III, 209f. For an expansion of Nevin's sacramental and Christological views of ecclesiology see our pp. 207f.

³Hodge, "The Beauty of Holiness", PS, pp. 211f.

holiness seems to be added up from the spiritual holiness of its members instead of being a reflection of Christ's holiness. Would this not lead to saying that the Church had holiness in and of itself and that it erred according to each member's confusion of his own spiritual holiness with that of the Holy Spirit? Hodge would argue no, because holiness comes from the one Holy Spirit and must be judged in relation to Biblical doctrines. But he has contended that each saint may ultimately have a private relationship to the Holy Spirit and to truth. Could this not lead to each believer having a private claim to knowledge and to the Holy Spirit? Such a possession could, if accompanied by the individual's acknowledgement of his own pious fruits, be made the ground of treating visible Christian unity and order either with contempt or as superficial. Also this view could dismiss great masses of Christians who do not hold our own doctrines and have our holy virtues as nominal. This seems to be Hodge's case in light of his intellectualizing of faith and of his readiness to judge the visible churches by the rational, empirical standards which he applied to other societies. It appears that Hodge denied not only the objective significance of Christ's sanctified Humanity, but the unlimited cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. For him, holiness merely defined the purifying of an individual's polluted spirituality so as to produce piety. Even this must be conditioned and accomplished solely through private faith.¹ As we shall see later,

¹In a letter to his fiancée, Hodge stressed the prior agency of faith to holiness: "All our ability to obey is obtained by faith. Nothing else will purify the heart....He then that wishes to attain to holiness will be disappointed after all his efforts, unless he begins by believing." Hodge, "My Dear Sarah" (Princeton, 1818) LCH, p. 38.

this is one of the reasons why he treats the sacraments largely as memorial signs to benefit the holiness of individual worshippers.¹

We might ask, cannot the visible Church (including all its organized forms) be holy and also be continually cleansed as well as the true believer? When Hodge fails to see that the true Church can be a visible fellowship set apart in time and space, he is denying that it has any real existence in the world or that it is separate from the world to which it should witness the Gospel. How can the Church have a Christian mission to the world if it is not a separate, visible, holy fellowship? It seems that Hodge finds no other missionary significance for the Church's attribute of holiness than that each believer is to be set apart from the world by his pious exercises which manifest his inward spiritual life.² A visible church's life and mission are mainly to enhance the holy piety of its own members through religious activities. To Hodge, real piety was a private matter between the saint and God and was not to be judged by a visible church.³ Therefore, with holiness as a private status depending on the internal character of each believer, Hodge could not attribute it to Christ or to a

¹Hodge received a letter from an old German friend, the President-Justice of the province of Magdeburg, making this same observation. "Your doctrine of the sacraments, as it seems to me, does not quite do justice to the 'objective content and import' of these ordinances, but subjects them too much to the state of mind of the recipient, whom they are destined to justify and to sanctify." "Ludwig von Gerlach to Dr. Hodge" (Magdeburg, August 8, 1847), LCH, pp. 329. Cf. Hodge, WL, pp. 178-203.

²Hodge, WL, pp. 204-238.

³Hodge, ST, III, p. 576.

visible body of Christians. But unless the pattern of holiness is not already actualized in the one life of Christ and promised to the Christian community, as well as to scattered individuals,¹ would not the life of holiness in the true Church vary as to the individual saints' ideas on how to live holy lives? Hodge does say that there is a unity of holiness among the saints because there is one Holy Spirit dwelling in them,² but this gives us the impression that the Church is the Body of the Spirit and not the Body of Christ. We could argue that unity of saints as one Church or one Body in Christ needs to be the prior basis of holiness. But Hodge treats unity as the second attribute of the true Church.

Unity

Because the idea of unity influences our idea of the true Church, Hodge contended that its true understanding is threefold, as follows:

1. Spiritual; the unity of faith and of communion.
2. Comprehensive; the Church is one as it is catholic, embracing all the people of God.
3. Historical; it is the same Church in all ages. In all these senses, the Church considered as the communion of saints, is one; in no one of these senses can unity be predicated of the Church as visible.³

We need not reiterate Hodge's ideas as brought out in our last chapter on the invisible communion of saints, but we may allow him to stress again how the spiritual unity depends ultimately upon

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 282.

²Hodge, E, p. 153.

³Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 270. We will discuss the Church's historical unity, as does Hodge, under the separate attribute of perpetuity.

intellectual agreement to doctrinal truths and upon mutual pious affections. This first point Hodge emphasized by declaring that Christ's Spirit dwells in the hearts of saints so as to lead them "all to the belief of the same truths."¹ Thus the unity of the Church can be described as the unity of faith among all believers. "The Spirit cannot teach one set or class of men one thing, and another class the opposite. So far as men are taught of God, they must believe alike."² What were men to "believe alike"? To Hodge, this could only be true doctrines of the method of salvation, which, as we saw earlier, he expounded in his definition of the saint. He seems to say that if men do not hold his system of doctrines, they do not "believe alike", and thus have not the Holy Spirit nor unity of faith essential for membership in the one true Church. Hodge would deny this by simply repeating that "Those whom he (the Holy Spirit) guides, he guides into the knowledge of truth, and as he cannot contradict himself, those under his guidance, must in all essential matters, believe the same truths."³

However, Hodge insisted that the true Church's inward unity of faith always expresses itself outwardly in the profession of the true religion. Because "all the normal or legitimate manifestations of the unity of the Church, must be the fruits of the Spirit," all confessions of faith contain the Gospel in them, even though they

¹Ibid., p. 271.

²Hodge, Lecture: "The Unity of the Church" (n.d.), MS H6624u at P.T.S.

³Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 143.

might also reflect the imperfections of man's nature.¹ Therefore, any visible Church which has a creed must also have true believers. Even though he declared the "profession of the true religion" by groups of Christians to be "the only essential mark of a true (visible) Church,"² Hodge asserted that professing the truth does not necessarily mean believing the truth. Therefore, true unity of faith can only apply to individual saints in whom the Holy Spirit produces the same rational knowledge and belief of the biblical truth. in

This view resulted from Hodge's observation of the disunity in all visible churches. "Unity of faith does not exist within the pale of these several churches," because not only do they call each other heretical, but infidelity in all forms is found among its members. The Romanists degrade the idea of unity into that of outward connection. The Anglicans of the Oxford School make unity of faith merely unity of profession.³ But for men to "believe alike", Hodge argues, there must not be any external relationships that must be essential to the true Church's unity of faith.

But would this not lead to disunity of faith if every saint could individually determine what are the essential truths? Hodge would answer no, because the Bible, as the "only rule of faith", is

¹Hodge, Lecture: "Unity of the Church", MS H6624u at P.T.S. Cf. Hodge "Is the Church of Rome a part of the Visible Church?" BRPR (April, 1846), p. 342.

²Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 382.

³Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 271f.

"sufficiently perspicuous" with the aid of the Holy Spirit so as to allow the "divine right of private judgment" of all essential truths.¹ Besides, Hodge would contend that diversity of opinions, which are due to imperfect knowledge, do not violate the Church's unity of faith unless it affects important doctrines.² In any case, this is "less evil" than the hypocritical appearance of the visible churches' unity of faith.³

Again by an empirical approach, Hodge pointed to the unholy affections within visible churches, the separate ecclesiastical fellowships and the practice of schism and excommunication to prove that the Church's "unity of communion" could only belong to the invisible communion of saints.

If it be true that there is a warm sympathy, a real brotherly affection, between all the members of Christ's body, then nothing can be plainer than that the great mass of nominal Christians are not members of that body. The unity of the Spirit, the bond of perfectness, Christian love, does not unite the members of any extended visible society into one holy brotherhood; and therefore no such society is the Church of Christ.⁴

However, Hodge would hasten to add that true "inward spiritual communion expresses itself outwardly, not only in acts of kindness, but especially and appropriately in all acts of Christian fellowship."⁵ True believers associate together to worship and to

¹Hodge, ST, I, pp. 152, 188.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 144f.

³Later we shall see how Hodge fought against what he thought was doctrinal hypocrisy among American Presbyterians to the point of trying to block the reunion of the Old School and New School Presbyterian Churches. Wide diversity of opinions in respect to doctrines and polity could exist between denominations, but not within one particular sect.

⁴Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853, p. 272.

⁵Ibid., p. 271.

maintain the truth through instruction and discipline and thus "appear before the world as a visible body." But because God has not given man the power to search the heart, the terms of communion in this external body are not an infallible evidence of regeneration and true faith, but a "credible" profession of the true religion, which can be evidenced by the individual's living faith and fruits of holiness, but which does not validate his membership in the true Church.¹

It seems that the outward unity of communion is not really an essential characteristic of the true Church to Hodge, because he bases its organization primarily on "expediency and convenience", which he admits gives rise to separate ecclesiastical bodies and disunity in opinions.² He once lectured his students: "One of the greatest evils in the history of the Church has been the conscious recurring effort to keep men united externally who were inwardly at variance." He went on to add that Christians who differ as to doctrine, order or action should separate or otherwise their outward fellowship would be insincere, injurious and evil.³ Elsewhere Hodge refers to sectarianism as the "lesser of

¹Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 141f; "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), pp. 671f, 678, 682.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 144f. Hodge does say the visible Church is a "divine institution", but as we shall see in our next chapter, it is based on the socio-religious nature of man so that he can better perform God's precepts and is not based on Christ's continuous and undivided Body. Hodge, ST, II, p. 604; III, pp. 547f.

³Hodge, Lecture: "Unity of the Church" (n.d.), MS H6624u at P.T.S.

two evils" to that of "formal uncongenial union."¹ In both the lecture and the article, he goes on to say that efforts should be made to remove these external differences and separations, but he ends by declaring that as long as we remember that real unity is "inward and by the Spirit", the true Church retains its unity of communion.

From Hodge's idea of the Church's attribute of spiritual unity, we might draw these conclusions. He does admit that Christ is the center and the Holy Spirit is the unifying principle of the Church, so as to emphasize that the Church's unity of faith and communion is not created by man out of the visible organizations of the Church. But he dismissed any attempts to place the Church's unity in the organic union of God and man in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Hodge rejected what Mercersburg's Philip Schaff wrote: "The specific character of Christianity consists in this that it is the full reconciliation and enduring life-union of man with God, continuing in the person of Jesus Christ." Neither was he ready to accept fully what John Nevin said:

The unity of the Church then is a cardinal truth, in the Christian system. It is involved in the conception of the Christian salvation itself....We are not Christians, each one by himself, and for himself, but we become such through the Church...The life of Christ in the Church, is in the first place inward and invisible - but to be real, it must also become outward.²

¹Hodge, "Principles of Church Union...", BRPR (April, 1865), p. 281.

²Hodge, "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 173, 185-186.

It also follows that Hodge seems to regard the true Church's unity of communion as only incidentally related to the visible Church, because he fails to say anything about the unity of the invisible with the visible. When he argues that until there is inward unity of faith and communion there can be no external visible unity, it would appear that he has denied the established unity and act of reconciliation of Christ, and instead surplants this with a unity brought about by co-operation of individual saints.¹ Thus we can understand why he first begins with the true believers recognizing each other by individual profession and fruits, and then afterwards they form or become identified with a Christian church. Finally, we might suggest that Hodge fails to take the disunity among Christians very seriously; instead he seems to escape the divisions of the Church and the world by a flight into the invisible. Maybe this is due to his idea that disunity would be impossible if the true Church is always thought of as a spiritual union of individual believers. If a member's faith or life was not in accord with what he called "things of the Spirit", then he would say that the individual was not really a true believer or member of the true Church. By thus viewing the true Church's attribute of unity as solely spiritualistic and individualistic, Hodge could allow himself room to maneuver freely so as to adjust any scripture, doctrine or ethic to fit his rationalistic pattern of ecclesiology.

When Hodge treats the true Church's comprehensive unity or its catholicity, he uses the same concepts as expressed under the

¹Hodge, Sermon: "Unity of the Church", MS 6624by at P.T.S.

attribute of spiritual unity, but here his emphasis is on the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the saints with sincere faith and piety.

Because there is only one true Church, it must embrace all the people of God. All individuals who believe and obey the "true religion" are within the true Church, "no matter what their external ecclesiastical connections may be, or whether they sustain such relations at all" and regardless of any of their external circumstances (e.g. "culture, colour, or nationality").¹ Only what is necessary for salvation can establish the boundary of the true Church; so Hodge insisted that wherever there is the Holy Spirit, truth, and piety there is the Church.² "This brings the nature of the Church down to a palpable matter of fact."³ Therefore Hodge could argue that the Church must include all good, pious men and must exclude all the unpious. If one were to say that the catholicity of the Church was not evidenced solely by Christian piety, Hodge would accuse him of "doing despite unto the Spirit of God... (who) is not only within, but without all external Church organizations."⁴

Again Hodge attacked the Roman and Anglican "prelatists" for defining the catholicity in terms of the visible Church. If the Church is thought of as a visible body, then there can be no

¹Ibid.; "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 145.

²Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1865), pp. 709, 713f.

³Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 275.

⁴Ibid., p. 276.

true religion, piety or salvation outside the pale of that society. "The universal faith of Christendom" has true faith in Christ as the only condition for membership and not acceptance of ecclesiastical societies, forms or politics. Therefore the true catholic Church is invisible. Citing Cyprian and Augustine, Hodge affirmed that "whoever is divorced from the Church, is united to an adulteress" and that those who are "good cannot divide themselves from the Church." He argued that Palmer wrongly applies this to the visible Church.¹ "There is no separation from the Church involved in withdrawing from an external body whose terms of communion hurt the enlightened conscience."² Hodge admitted that normally a saint's piety will be seen within a visible church, but this is not necessary, because the true Church catholic includes all worshippers of Christ whether they be in a visible Church or "alone in a desert."³

Nevertheless, Hodge said that as the invisible Church catholic consists of all and only true believers, so too "the visible Church catholic consists of all those throughout the world, that profess the true religion, together with their children."⁴ Does this mean that all the particular churches with professing members make up the visible Church catholic? It would seem so, especially when Hodge wrote that "the visible Church consists of all who profess the true

¹Ibid., pp. 274f. Cf. William Palmer, Treaties on Church of Christ, Vol. 1, pp. 38f.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 154.

³Hodge, ST, II, p. 397.

⁴Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 381. Our underlining.

religion or saving doctrine." But when he goes on to add, "the mere fact of their having faith and avowing it in their conversation and deportment, makes them members of the visible Church, in the true, scriptural, and Presbyterian, though not in the Puseyite (Anglican prelatist), sense of the term", it is clear that he was thinking of the visible Church's catholicity in terms of each true believer's profession and obedience.¹

Hodge's main criticism of any ritualistic system of doctrine was, "It makes the Church so prominent that Christ and the truth are eclipsed."² But the severity of his polemic seems to advocate private Christianity and disregards the priority of the catholic faith of the worshipping community. He can only be admired for trying to distinguish the one true Church from false creations of man, and his idea of catholicity would certainly include Christians from every corner of the earth. But it appears that the comprehensive unity, as he recognized it, was based on the sameness of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, rational faith and subjective piety, and not something that transcended individualism (e.g. person and work of Christ, ontology of the Christian community, the universal and eschatological reconciling mission of the Church).

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 463, 461. Hodge's underlining. By placing the individual prior to the community, Hodge could substitute "profession of the true religion" for "word and sacraments" as the mark of the visible Church catholic. Thus he could say that because the Romanists, Erastians, Prelatists, Congregationalists, etc., all profess enough of the truth to save the soul, they can be called churches with some of their members in the true Church catholic. Cf. Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), pp. 382f.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 149.

Perpetuity

In discussing the true Church's final attribute, its historical unity, Hodge makes the same points and uses the same arguments as before. His use of perpetuity rather than the more traditional term apostolicity might be explained by his free interchange of the two in identifying the perpetuity of Christianity as a permanent system of doctrinal truth written out by the Apostles, and the perpetuity of the Church as "the continued existence on earth of sincere believers who profess the true religion."¹ Hodge states that the true apostolicity of the Church consists "in the sameness of faith and Spirit with the apostles" among all saints throughout history.² Thus the true Church is perpetual, because "it is now what it was in the days of the apostles. It has continued the same without interruption, from the beginning, and is to continue until the final consummation; for the gates of hell can never prevail against it."³

The historical continuity of the Church's existence is dependent upon infallible teachings of the apostles recorded in the Bible. "An apostle was a man endued with plenary knowledge of the gospel by immediate revelation, and who was rendered infallible in the communication of that knowledge by the gift of inspiration."⁴

¹Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), p. 689; "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 157f, 171, 190f.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 154.

³Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 276.

⁴Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 554.

Christ bore witness to the correctness of their doctrines and sanctioned their declarations by signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is these doctrinal truths which are perpetuated, and not the apostolic office or life which ceased at the "death of the original twelve."¹

The true Christian is a person who sincerely believes and professes this unchanged "system of doctrines supernaturally revealed and recorded in the Bible", and who thus perpetuates the Church's existence on earth until the second advent of Christ. This perpetuity is guaranteed by the promise that Christ will be with the true Church to the end of the world, thus maintaining an unbroken continuance of truth to the last day among all true believers. At times, it seems as if Hodge meant that not Christ nor the Holy Spirit but the knowledge of Christ's system of doctrinal truth is that which is promised to the mind of the individual believer so as to perpetuate the Church.² The truth which the Apostles believed is that which each true Christian has believed throughout history. But because the knowledge and the communication of the truth have been different since the Apostles' death, the believer has access to the truth only through the indwelling of the Spirit, who illuminates his mind to the essential doctrines within the New Testament and the law within the Old

¹Hodge, ST, I, pp. 139-141; III, pp. 762-763.

²Hodge insisted that "Theology..., as it existed in the mind of Paul, and is recorded in his writings, is precisely what will be the theology of the last saint who is to live on the earth." Hodge, "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), p. 158.

Testament. By saying that all true Christians believe the same essential doctrines of truth and have the same Spirit as the Apostles, Hodge can interchange apostolicity for perpetuity at will. But it can be seriously questioned whether he understood the true nature of the Church's apostolicity as other than the preservation of the Apostles' record of truth in the New Testament, instead of also including continuation of their redeemed and obedient life founded on the Words and Deed, the Revelation and the Mission, the Message and the Life of Jesus Christ.

This will become more evident as we turn to see how Hodge defined the true Church's perpetuity in terms of the individual saint's belief in the truth. Because the Church must be defined as the communion of saints, "all that is essential to its perpetuity is that there should always be believers."¹ As long as there are pious individuals who believe the true religion, the Church is perpetuated; and as long as there is truth, there will be true believers. There shall always be a seed to serve Christ as long as the world lasts regardless of any external circumstances (e.g. civil persecution, apostasy of all visible churches). We remember Hodge's insistence that each saint has immediate access to Christ's benefits, to the Holy Spirit and to the Bible; therefore, he can declare that the individual can have true religion without deriving it mediately through those who have gone before, be they of the true Church or the visible Church. Spiritual life and truth are not inherited

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 277.

as social or civil life and laws are. Thus the continual true Church, as the sum of all saints in any one generation, has her faith always but only resting immediately on the Bible as the complete, unchangable and eternal truth.¹

When Hodge wrote that all Protestants "teach the Church is where the truth is; that the Church may be continued in scattered individuals", he in effect was saying that the Church is "perpetuated in scattered believers, each in his own narrow sphere confessing the truth", regardless of the Christian community or whether saints together worship God and profess their faith.² As we have seen, Hodge dismissed from Christianity any thought of all saints corporately participating in the life of Christ. Instead he prefers to call it a "system of doctrines", an "inward state" or religious consciousness determined by that system and a "rule of action", with the Holy Spirit directing the private judgment as to what Biblical truths are necessary to include the individual within the true Church so as to perpetuate it.³

Hodge would be quick to declare that the saint need not have perfect knowledge of the truth to perpetuate the Church. "Such perfection cannot be necessary to salvation, because it is not

¹Hodge, "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 163-165. Cf. Hodge's doctrine of "plenary inspiration", ST, I, pp. 153-168.

²Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 709, 700.

³Hodge, "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 171-172, 187; "Agressive Character of Christianity", PS, p. 308.

essential to piety....We constantly see men who give every evidence of piety, who are either ignorant or erroneous as to matters of faith," and yet they are members of the true Church. Therefore Hodge concluded, "The perpetuity of the Church consequently does not imply that it must always profess the truth, without any admixture of error."¹ But how can Hodge also declare that the true Church "has never ceased to be holy and to be orthodox?"² How can the Church continue only where there is truth, and yet have its true members ignorant or in error? Hodge conceded that such a situation is difficult, but all depends upon the "importance of the truths concerned". Nothing but the method of salvation is essential truth, all else is "non-essential". Therefore, he can point out again and again "that the true Church consists of true believers, and the visible Church of professed believers, whether they be many or few, organized or dispersed," whether "the only communion of the faithful is to be in the heart and in secret...hidden from the sight of men."³ As long as the method of salvation is produced in the mind of the individual through the Bible and the Holy Spirit, the Church is perpetuated for one more generation. The testimony of history through literature, hymns, prayers and lives shows abundant evidence of personal piety, and thus the continued existence of the true Church. In short, Hodge seems to believe that the true

¹Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 692f.

²Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 379.

³Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 691f, 714, 711.

Church perpetuates itself throughout history by each saint having a private relationship to the doctrinal system of essential truth taught by Christ, recorded in the Bible, made understandable by the Holy Spirit and proved by the individual's piety.

With this view of perpetuity, it can be understood why Hodge could write, "there is no necessity for the continued existence of the Church as an external society."¹ But this must be taken in the context of what Hodge repeatedly called "the undeniable scriptural principle" of the idea of the Church.

That nothing can be necessary to the existence of the Church which is not necessary to salvation, is so nearly a self-evident proposition, that its terms cannot be understood without forcing assent. Salvation involves union with Christ; union with Christ involves union with the Church, for the Church is his body; that is, it consists of those who are united to Him. Therefore, nothing which is compatible with the union with Christ, can be incompatible with the union to the Church. Consequently, the Church exists so long as true believers exist. It is a contradiction, therefore, to say that anything is necessary to the being of the Church, which is not necessary to salvation.²

Using this principle to expound his idea of the true Church's continual existence, Hodge eliminates the necessity for a visible Christian community, apostolic succession and infallibility of visible churches. Also, through a mixture of rationalism and spiritualism, he limits the full significance of objective, historical role of the Word, the sacraments and the ministry. Finally, he subjects the mission of the true Church to a static summation of the pious elect. By expanding these points, one can

¹Ibid., p. 698.

²Ibid., p. 692; Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 383.

understand how Hodge qualified the true Church's existence by his soteriological principle.

As was usually the case, he centered his attack on the Romanists and the Oxford Movement. The almost universal conceded proposition, argued Hodge, is that Christ's promise to be with His Church to the end of the world did not secure the perpetuity of any particular church as a body of professing Christians who are united by some ecclesiastical organization. Any and all such visible churches have lapsed from faith and purity and may cease to exist even nominally. Whereas the true Church has continued on earth in individuals when visible churches disappeared, continuing visible Christian communities are not a necessary condition for the perpetuity of the true Church. To say one becomes united to Christ and saved because of his being united to a visible Church, Hodge insisted, is unscriptural, for "union with Christ (by personal faith) in the divine order precedes, and is entirely independent of union with any visible society."¹

Hodge simply dismissed apostolic succession as an attempt to control the Holy Spirit by unholy heretics who appealed to the hearts of the ignorant and the wicked by offering them quick pardons and easy eternal security. "Historical proof" does not validate faith in such a theory, argued Hodge.

The Church can exist without a pope, without prelates, yea without presbyters, if in its essential nature it is the communion of saints. There is, therefore, no promise of an uninterrupted succession of validly

¹Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 691f, 698f; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 277f, (July, 1853), p. 379.

ordained church-officers, and consequently no foundation for faith in any such succession.

Because the true Church may consist of scattered believers, there is no need for the continued existence of any visible churches furnished with regular order of church officers.¹

When Hodge brought up the question of the infallibility of the Church, he said:

The only sense in which even the true church is infallible is, that its members are kept from the rejection of any doctrine essential to their salvation. Rome not satisfied with attributing this infallibility to a body which has no claim to it, extends it to all matters of faith and even... of fact.²

Hodge declared that Calvin had taught "one of the cardinal doctrines of Protestants, that the (true) Church may be perpetuated in scattered believers; or in other words that the apostasy of every visible organized society from the true faith is consistent with the perpetuity of the Church."³ Hodge argued that Rome would not

¹Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 151-155; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), pp. 362f, (April, 1853), p. 278. Cf. Hodge, ST, I, pp. 138-142, 146.

²Hodge, "Thornwell on the Apocrypha", BRPR (April, 1845), p.280.

³Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 695f, 703. Hodge used the following remarks of Calvin taken from Calvin's "Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France", Para. 6, Institutes: "Our controversy turns on these hinges: first, they contend that the form of the church is always apparent and observable. Secondly, they set this form in the see of the Roman Church and its hierarchy. We, on the contrary, affirm that the church can exist without any visible appearance, and that its appearance is not contained within that outward magnificence which they foolishly admire. Rather, it has quite another mark: namely, the pure preaching of God's Word and the lawful administration of the sacraments. They rage if the church cannot always be pointed to with the finger." Hodge's footnote on this citation says: "Had Calvin lived in our day he would hear with surprise zealous Protestants, and even Presbyterians crying out against the doctrine that visible organization

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admit to the apostasy of their church because it would destroy their belief that they were the only true perpetual Church. Thus they have to claim to be infallible even though they teach heresy. This has caused the Church of Rome to be "so corrupt that it is the duty of the people of God to come out of it and to renounce its fellowship."¹ Hodge tries to prove, through use of examples from the Bible and history, that the visible Church, as a society, has entirely apostatized in the past and that Rome's recognition of infallibility is "incompatible with either religious or civil liberty."²

A church which claims to be infallible, ipso facto, claims to be the mistress of the world....A church which claims the right to decide what is true in doctrine or obligatory in morals, and asserts the power to enforce submission to its decision on the pain of eternal perdition, leaves no room for any other authority upon earth.³

Hodge argued that if the visible Church be infallible, then it alone could grant forgiveness, could be the means of salvation, could exercise

the right to dissolve marriages, to free men from the obligations of their oaths, and citizens from their allegiance, to abrogate civil laws and to depose sovereigns....It is obvious, therefore, that where this doctrine is held there can be no liberty of

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is not essential to the Church." But we might ask Hodge, would not Calvin be surprised at those who denied "the visible Church as mother of believers" and who overlooked that separation from her meant "the denial of God and Christ"? Calvin, Institutes IV, 1, 4, 10.

¹Hodge, ST, I, p. 149.

²Ibid., pp. 129-150. Cf. Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 700-709; "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), pp. 361f.

³Hodge, ST, I, p. 149.

opinion, no freedom of conscience, no civil or political freedom.¹

Hodge insisted that any or all visible churches could not be infallible, because God committed neither freedom from error nor unlimited authority in matters of faith or morals to any Christian community or to any person. Hodge thought that religious and civil liberty could be maintained only if the individual were allowed to obey God or the magistrate through his conscience. This former obedience is through private consultation with the system of truth contained in the Bible, and should not be absolutely conditioned by any ecclesiastical society. Because Hodge places such an emphasis on this exclusive right to private judgement of scripture and also on the apostasy of the visible Church, it can be understood why he says that "the faith of a Church is properly meant the faith of its actual (true) members" and thus the true Church can "be perpetuated in scattered believers each in his own narrow sphere confessing the truth" apart from the historical Christian community.² Thus Hodge seems to display a skeptical view of an historical, developing Church. He was afraid, on the one hand, that if one accepts that there is an historical movement

¹Ibid., p. 150.

²Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 694, 700. Cf. Hodge, "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 187f; ST, I, pp. 183-188. Hodge does say that "any man,...assumes a fearful responsibility who sets himself in opposition to the faith of the Church universal." But he would be quick to add that if the man were a true saint, he would be in agreement with other saints to the essential scriptural truths. Hodge, ST, III, pp. 870f.

or development in Christianity, then one denies the sameness of truth upon which the true Church has always been founded. But on the other hand, he denied that there is an essential, historical unity in the outward life of any or all visible churches, because this would reject Protestantism and adopt Romanism's doctrines of infallibility.¹

With Hodge thus viewing the Church's perpetuity in terms of the continual existence of individuals who personally profess the essential biblical doctrines, it might be asked whether the word, the sacraments and the ministry are absolutely necessary to the being of the true Church. Assuming that all Christians agreed, Hodge declared that "The word of God has been read in most apostate Churches...so that in every age there has been a public profession of the truth, in which some sincere hearts have joined," thus perpetuating the Church, "it follows that everything necessary to its preservation and extension must also be perpetual. The scriptures teach that the word, sacraments and the ministry, are the divinely appointed means for that purpose; and...these means

¹Hodge, "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 186-192. Hodge rejected the Mercersburg theology which proposed that Christ's Incarnation was the foundation and life of "the unity of the historical Church" and thus that the true Church's perpetuity must include historical visibility in forms of organization, discipline, worship as well as doctrine. However, Hodge, a few years earlier, had found that it was his orthodox duty to write: The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Parts I-II, (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1839-40), so that the New School Presbyterians could be blamed for apostacizing from the historical doctrines and order of the "true character of our (Old School) Church." This paradox in Hodge's ecclesiology will be unveiled in our Section II where the appearance of the Church is divorced from the idea of the true Church.

have never failed, and never shall fail."¹

There was no question in Hodge's mind about the imperishability of the Word of God, which he completely identifies as the Bible. The Sacred Scriptures contain those divine truths which every adult needs to discern by the power of the Holy Spirit in order to be saved. Hodge reasons that because the truth of the Bible is permanent and is always preserved in its integrity, it has the "requisite efficiency" as a means for salvation and can thus be used to perpetuate the true Church.²

But the Church's preservation was due only to the agency of the Holy Spirit who produced in each believer the "requisite susceptibility" to saving truths. As Hodge criticized the Romanists for limiting the saving power of the Holy Spirit to those members of the visible Church, so too he criticized Martin Luther for holding that the Spirit operates only in conjunction with the Word. "If, therefore, the Bible teaches that infants are regenerated and saved, it teaches that the Spirit operates not only with and by the Word, but also without it, when, how and where He sees fit."³

¹Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 712-713.

²Hodge, ST, III, pp. 466-479. Also it is a well established fact, observed Hodge, "that true religion prevails in any community, in proportion to the degree in which the young are instructed in the facts and indoctrinated in the truths of the Bible." For Hodge, the moral truths (vs. saving truths) contained in the Bible make it necessary for the public schools to teach courses according to the Biblical facts. For his views on parochial and state schools, see our pp. 242f, 278f.

³Hodge, ST, III, p. 472f, 482f.

It appears as if Hodge viewed the saving influence of the Holy Spirit as operating independently of either the Christian community or the scriptures. If nothing was necessary for preserving the Church that was not necessary for salvation, one might conclude that saving truth was understood by Hodge as ultimately the inward working of the Holy Spirit on the private consciences of those individuals elected to be members of the true invisible Church for that particular generation.

But Hodge would answer, "The Christian can no more live without the Bible, than his body can live without food." "The Bible contains all the extant revelations of God, which He designed to be the rule of faith and practice for his Church." However, he seems to treat the Bible as more of an infallible aid or standard by which the individual can be "conscious" of his divine life and can perform "rational exercises" than as containing the objective message of God in Christ to the historical community of faith.¹

The same rationalism and spiritualism seem evident from the relationship Hodge draws between the Church's perpetuity and the sacraments and the ministry. He observed that because neither were necessary for salvation, they could not be essential to the perpetuity of the true Church. That is, the true Church as the

¹Ibid., pp. 476f; Hodge, ST, I, pp. 182f. "With regard to doctrinal truth, we may hold that the Spirit dwells in the believer as a divine teacher, and that all true divine knowledge comes from his inward illumination, without denying that a divine, authoritative rule of faith is laid down in the word of God, which it is impossible the inward teaching of the Spirit should ever contradict. We may believe that the indwelling Spirit guides the children of God in the path of duty, without at all questioning the authority of the moral law as revealed in the Bible." Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 552.

invisible communion of individual saints could exist without the celebration of Baptism or the Lord's Supper or without the office of the ministry, because the Holy Spirit can produce in the elected individual all the spiritual benefits necessary for his salvation. The sacraments are only "precepts" or "moral obligations" which, when performed, will enhance the saint's spiritual life, if he is sincerely receptive, so that he will have Christian fellowship with other saints. As we have seen, Hodge rejected the historical continuity of the ministry. Instead he says that the Holy Spirit never fails from time to time to call men from among the communion of saints to be ministers. But the perpetuity of the true Church does not depend upon the ministry. Rather it depends on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in true believers. Therefore, when Hodge says that the sacraments and the ministry are "means" for the "preservation and extension" of the true Church, he really is saying that they are important, but dispensable methods of continuing the true Church. Because "while the Word and sacraments are the ordinary channels of the Spirit's influence, He has left himself free to act with or without these or any other means."¹

These ideas seem to arise from Hodge's wish to avoid ritualistic sacramentalism and prelacy for fear they would pervert the individual soul's immediate and saving access to the benefits of Christ.

¹Hodge, ST, III, pp. 485, 516f; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 452-457; "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 149; "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), pp. 385, 390; "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 699f, 712f; PS, pp. 330-338.

If external rites and creature agents are made necessary to our access to God, then those rites and agents will more or less take the place of God, and men will come to worship the creature rather than the creator. This tendency constantly gathers strength, until actual idolatry is the consequence, or until all religion is made to consist in the performance of external services. Hence this system is not only destructive of true religion, but leads to security¹ in the indulgence of sin and commission of crimes.

But in his interest to protect the liberty of faith and the freedom of the Holy Spirit, Hodge forfeited the individual's prior relationship to the historical and visible Christian community and to the ministry of Christ. He saw no correlation or foundation of the Church's ministry with Christ's ministry. Instead he stressed that the life and ministry of the perpetual true Church depended upon the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, for "why was it that so few were converted under the ministry of Christ, and so many thousands under that of the Apostles?"²

The significance of this is understood when he fails to relate the perpetuity of the true Church with development or mission. Instead he discusses these aspects in the context of the visible Church "in her organized capacity only."³ But because

¹Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 156.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 476. Hodge continually stresses that the Holy Spirit is given by Christ to the whole Church and not to any self-perpetuating society, ministry or sacrament. Cf. Hodge, "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 370f; "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 389.

³Hodge, "Voluntary Societies and Ecclesiastical Organizations", BRPR (January, 1837), pp. 102f. Hodge admits that most of the true believers are in visible churches, but not all. Likewise, not all within the visible churches are true believers. "This external society, therefore, is not a company of believers; it is not the Church which is Christ's Body; the attributes and promises of the Church do not belong to it." Hodge, "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p. 674.

he has continually insisted that the organized Church is not the true Church, it would seem that the growth and mission of the true Church is essentially one of individual piety stimulating further piety so as to perpetuate the true Church. Thus, Hodge appears to view the Church's life as static and individualistic, instead of as a continuation of corporate missionary life patterned after the Apostles' incorporation into the ministry of Christ.

Hodge's reactions to schisms were also in line with his rational view of the true Church's perpetuity in that it "is either separation, without just cause, from the true Church, or the refusing to commune with those who are really the children of God."¹ In both cases it is not the visible Church involved but the individual believer rejecting those essential doctrines of Biblical truth that are necessary to constitute him a member of the true Church. Because the Church always exists wherever there are true believers, it makes no difference in what outward forms or how many different groups they might organize themselves as long as they confess the true religion and do not refuse to admit other true believers to their communion. Thus the true Church could always continue invisibly regardless of external corruptions, persecutions or divisions. Whenever unscriptural terms of communion are enjoined upon true believers, Hodge declared that it was a duty "which we owe to God and to the real unity of the church" to separate from those who have become corrupted by false doctrines or idolatrous rites. But

¹Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 714.

doing so is not the sign of schism, for the people of God are never separated from the truth.¹ "The only schismatics in the case are the Romanists, who denounce and excommunicate the Protestants because they profess the truth," because they, like the Anglicans, falsely claim that the true Church is essentially a visible body. But as nothing connected with externals is essential to salvation or the being of the Church, no split in a visible church can destroy the perpetuity of the true Church as the invisible communion of individual saints, be it divested of "all visible indications of life" or even if its members are scattered and unknown.²

To conclude our section on attributes, Hodge argued that these must determine the idea of the Church's nature. He accused the Early Church Fathers of not keeping a clear "distinction between the visible and the invisible" Church, and due to their "error", the attributes were gradually transferred to the external Church. And "as the visible Church did not suit the attributes of the true Church, the attributes were made to suit the Church." But by empirical reason and scripture, all Christians know that every visible church has lapsed from faith and purity, churches are not united and not one has ever been perpetual. "The attributes, then, of holiness, unity and perpetuity, do not belong to any external society and therefore no such society can be the Church." Because the attributes

¹Hodge, "Schaff's Protestantism", BRPR (October, 1845), p. 631.

²Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 714f.

belong only to true believers due to their internal virtue, the true Church must be an invisible communion of individual saints.¹

It seems that Hodge has superimposed his idea of the Church upon the attributes so that they are to be regarded as independent qualities inhering primarily in the saint and not as descriptions discerned and affirmed by the faith of the historical, visible Christian community which confronts the world with its unity, holiness, catholicity and continuity founded in Jesus Christ.

The Promises of the True Church

As we turn to the promises, we again see Hodge using the same inductive principles of rational Biblicism and causality, and declaring the implicit distinction between the invisible Church and the visible Church. He argued that from the five scriptural promises addressed to the Church we may infer that the nature of the true Church is the invisible communion of individual saints, because it is evident that these promises are fulfilled only for true believers.²

First, Hodge said that the most comprehensive promise to the Church "is that of the continual presence of Christ, by the indwelling of his Spirit." Using a cause and effect relationship, he argued that this presence could not be "inoperative" for it necessitates the

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), pp. 349f, 355f, 379f; (April, 1853), p. 278; "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), pp. 679f.

²Unless otherwise designated, these ideas of Hodge are drawn from "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 279-286; (July, 1853), pp. 348, 379f; ST, I, pp. 137-138.

manifestation of "holiness, righteousness and peace." Therefore, where these graces are, there is the true Church, for, "He is not, where these graces are not." Because the Holy Spirit will always dwell in the true believer, this promise is perpetual. It is also universal in that God promised to be with all His elected people and not "with some members of the Church to the exclusion of others."

It is "plain", argued Hodge, that this promise was not made to any external society, for no such society persistently renders evident these graces, which the "divine presence of necessity secures." Therefore, "God is not always present with the external Church." "The nominal Church would correspond with the real, the visible with the invisible, if the promise of the divine presence belonged to the former," but God is only with the true believer.

Second, Hodge wrote that the promise of "divine teaching" is made to ~~only~~ the true Church. The Holy Spirit, promised to the saints, leads each of them into all necessary truths for their salvation and to qualify them for the work to which each is called. Hodge meant that the abiding and saving knowledge, and not infallible knowledge, of religious matters is promised to all the elect without discrimination. Here we must remember that Hodge separated saving truth, supernaturally revealed in the New Testament, from God's providential truth revealed in the works of nature and in the constitution of man. These latter truths, although contained in the Bible, can be known apart from scripture, because they are universally acknowledged, empirical facts from which any man can

induce a knowledge of God and an immediate sense of right and wrong in regards to his social responsibilities.¹ Thus the "divine teaching" promised to the true Church, according to Hodge, is for spiritual salvation and not social responsibility.

Because Hodge saw that the visible Church included "good and bad, ignorant and enlightened, heterodox and orthodox, believing and infidel," it cannot be the true Church. Likewise, because heresy and skepticism exist in every Church (e.g. Churches of Scotland, of England, and of Rome), no such society can be the Church to which is promised divine teaching, "which precludes the possibility of fundamental error" or disagreement among believers "as to everything necessary to salvation." The teaching of God is promised only to those who continue in the truth, and they alone can belong to the invisible Church, the communion of saints. This divine guidance is promised to "the people of God as such in their personal and individual relation to Christ... (who) certainly did not die for any external, visible, organized society."²

Third, Hodge said that the true Church is divinely protected from internal decay and external destruction. "This promise is made to every individual member of the Church." Divine protection does not apply to the external Church, because first, many of its members are not "subjects" of such; second, it has not been "preserved from apostasy"; and third, it has been "destroyed" from time to time.

¹Hodge, ST, I, pp. 22, 58-60, 191-203, 339f; ST, II, pp. 107-109; "Beman on the Atonement", BRPR (January, 1845), p. 87f.

²Hodge, ST, I, p. 131.

The fourth promise to the Church was its extension "from sea to sea... (so) that all nations and people are to flow into it." Here Hodge did not mean all people in history and on earth, but only those elected to God's Kingdom. Inferring that the Romanists had Judaized Christianity by their attempt to establish a theocratic Church, Hodge reiterates Jesus' words, "My Kingdom is not of this world." Therefore, the Church or the "kingdom of God" consists in spiritual matters and its extension is "in the prevalence of love to God and man, of the worship and service of the Lord Jesus Christ." The saints' faith and love, not their visible community relationship, makes them the Church. "As they multiply and spread, so does the Church." Whereas some would limit "the dominion of the Redeemer" to the visible Church, the true Church can expand through piety.

The final promise Hodge considered the Church to have is holiness and salvation. Although we have continuously seen Hodge using these terms to determine the nature and the attributes of the Church, this present argument most vividly points to his definition of the true Church as an invisible communion of individual, visible saints. Christ secured the benefits of holiness and salvation for only the true Church and these blessings are promised to every member in communion with such, for "out of the Church there is not salvation, and within the Church there is no perdition." But "these are blessings of which individuals alone are susceptible. It is not a community or society, as such, that is redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, and saved. Persons, and not communities, are the subjects of these blessings." Therefore, if all individual members

of the Church are saved, the Church must be exclusively the communion of saints and not include all the membership of the visible churches. To make the Church an external society is to make salvation dependent upon men's external relation, "entirely irrespective of their moral character", and this contradicts the divine promises which are reserved for the saints and not "all sorts of men". Thus Hodge dismissed corporate salvation and universal redemption of men and communities.

Again it was in polemics with Rome and Oxford that Hodge declared that these five promises were addressed solely to individual members of the invisible Church. The theory that holds them pertaining to the visible churches "is necessarily destructive of religion and morality." Hodge judged that its fruits were: religion became mere formalism, it limited salvation, piety and the wrath of God, and it produced idolatry, "contemptuous language and deportment towards ...fellow Christians", and antinomianism. The theory that teaches these five promises are secured by external profession and membership in the visible Church and not by the "state of the heart and character of life" secures the wicked "no matter what their crimes... 'in the sure hope of a blessed resurrection'"; men will think they are "favourites of God" and then the "inevitable effect is pride, contempt, intolerance, malignity, and, when they dare, persecution."¹ Hodge does soften this by also saying, "Men

¹Hodge makes these judgments in numerous other places. Cf. Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 157; "What Is The Church?" (n.d.), MS H6624w at P.T.S., pp. 32-38; and "Draft... on the Church" MS H6624dr at P.T.S.

who have access to the Bible, cannot altogether resist the power of its truths," thus insinuating that some of those individuals who hold the false view that "the visible Church is the body of Christ" might be spared a certain sense of the true religion and morality.

We can understand Hodge's legitimate criticism of the Romanists and High Anglicans claiming to possess such promises, but in the severity of his polemic, he fails to consider that divine promises are made to individuals within a Christian community. This may be why he places the condition of the saint's having "right (spiritual) apprehensions of God" prior to the assurance of divine promise. But does this not make the Church a disembodied spirituality, instead of a visible fellowship of hope? By not mentioning Christ's reconciliation of man to man and man to God as one of the divine promises addressed to the Church, Hodge appears to say that there is no hope for the world but only for elected individuals.

The Prerogatives of the True Church

By and large, Hodge treats the prerogatives of the Church as he did the attributes and the promises; that is, they belong to the communion of saints or to the true believer and not to the visible Church as such. He summarizes the prerogatives as "the authority to teach and the right to discipline."¹ It is his insistence on establishing the seat of authority first before his consideration of the nature and extent of the duties themselves that

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 287.

causes him to treat these prerogatives under his "idea" of the true Church. As we shall see later, he refers the exercise of these rights and their duties first to individual believers and then to a visible church.¹

To whom do these prerogatives belong? Hodge says, "The answer to this question makes all the difference between Popery and Protestantism, between the Inquisition and the liberty wherewith Christ has made his people free."² The authority to teach and discipline belongs only to the invisible communion of true believers and their appropriate organs, because they alone are given the presence and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern the saving truths of the Bible. Where the Spirit dwells, there are the prerogatives, and because the Spirit dwells uniquely with the people of God, it is only their teaching and discipline, as guided by His Spirit, that Christ has promised to ratify. Hodge believed that individual true believers are the real "organs", and that any external visible body could be an appropriate organ to teach and discipline, if it really consisted of the true children of God.

"But no external visible body, as such is so far the organ of the Holy Spirit, that its teachings are the teaching of Christ and its decisions his judgments." By empirical observation, Hodge could say that "the visible Church is always a mixed body, and often controlled in its action by wicked or worldly men." If, therefore,

¹Hodge, "Draft...on the Church", MS H6624dr at P.T.S.; "The Church of God" (December 3, 1868), "Sermons", Al. Alc. at P.T.S.

²Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 287; ST, I, pp. 137f.

to them have been committed the prerogatives, then the people of God, by Christ's own command, are bound to obey those governed by the spirit of the world. Hodge further argues that the actions and decisions of the visible Church are not ratified in heaven, because the visible Church has often been contradictory and heretical and has excommunicated and persecuted the true people of God, and Christ certainly does not sanction such errors.¹

Hodge is basically concerned with those particular visible churches that equate their own teachings and action with those of Christ, so he was therefore offering the corrective that the authority to decide, maintain and promote the Truth of God could only be with the true invisible Church composed of individual saints. This can be seen more clearly when he argues that without such a view, Christians would lose their right of private judgment and private responsibility. It is the duty of every Christian to try the spirits, to search the scriptures and to judge for himself whether the things decreed or commanded by other Christians or a body of professed Christians are consistent with the Bible as the only rule for faith and practice.² "Faith, moreover, is an act for which every man is personally responsible; his salvation depends upon his believing the truth. He must, therefore, have the right to believe God." But if he has to submit to the teachings and discipline of the visible Church or its officers, then he forfeits

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), pp. 287-288; (July, 1853), p. 380; ST, III, p. 764.

²Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), p. 485f.

his divine private prerogative. Hodge declared that therefore, the Protestant doctrine of the true Church as the invisible communion of saints, which retains the priority of private judgment, must be the correct idea of the true Church.¹ Thus the question concerning the absolute possession of the prerogatives of the Church cannot be related to the externals of religion (e.g. the visible Church). Besides, Hodge would insist, all Christians, if they are truly saints, are led by the same Holy Spirit to believe the same essential doctrines. Thus they each can claim the same authority to teach and to discipline.² Hodge summed up his view on where the seat of these prerogatives lay, when he preached on John 20:23:

These powers are given to the Church, the body of Christ, his true followers, and not to any external, visible organized society as such.... The Church of Rome, or the Church of England, or the Church of Scotland...may teach what it pleases, or decide what it pleases, neither its teachings nor decisions will be ratified in heaven; unless they proceed from those members of Christ's body.... Of all the pretensions which ever afflicted the Christian world, there is none so fruitful of evil, as that of transferring to an external visible organization, what the Scriptures say of the Church of God, as the invisible communion of saints....³

Hodge was almost too sensitive to the attempts of Romanists and High Anglicans to lay absolute claim upon the prerogatives and to institutionalize them. This forced him to overstress the ultimate rights of individual saints in respect to teaching and

¹Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (April, 1853), p. 289; ST, III, pp. 762f. Our underlining.

²Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 155f; ST, I, pp. 183f; "Christian Rebuke", PS, pp. 273f.

³Hodge, Sermon No. 13 (n.d.), "Sermons, New Series, 1-47", MS H6624sf at P.T.S.

discipline. When different church societies exercised these duties, they could use different forms and modes,¹ provided these were not considered essential to the existence of the true Church and did not usurp the authority of scripture and the conscience of the individual.

Moreover, the other doctrines which are taught by church societies, beyond those which are necessary for salvation, cannot be considered as the teachings of the true Church, because in this area of truth the individual saint of the true Church has ultimate authority of decision. A counterpoint to this is that the visible church cannot require of any person who wishes to join its visible communion any doctrine that is unessential for salvation. It follows that if a visible church includes saving truths within its teaching, then it must be considered a part of the visible church, and some of its members must be true saints or members of the true Church. Such is the case even with the Roman Catholic Church.²

In other words, Hodge meant that the nature and extent of the true Church's teaching should be the basic and absolutely essential duty of any visible church. All churches must teach and demand a profession and adherence to the fundamental saving doctrines of the gospel. As long as the creed of a church contains these, and some of its members have given a credible evidence of a pious character, she is exercising this "first and greatest duty" of the true Church,

¹Hodge, "General Assembly," BRPR (July, 1845), p. 456.

²Hodge, "Is the Church of Rome a part of the Visible Church?", BRPR (April, 1846), p. 329.

and thus is to be assumed to be a part of the visible church, even though her other doctrines, her worship, sacraments, government, etc., might be false and corrupt.¹ Nevertheless, Hodge continually insisted that "all believers as individuals are one spiritual body,"² and "organization does not enter into the idea of the Church," but only arises out of the social nature of man and his need and divine duty to propagate and culture his spiritual nature.³ Nevertheless, he could see no other way for discipline to be exercised than through organized societies, because "the Church is too widely diffused for the whole to exercise their watch and care over each particular part."⁴ Again the method of discipline was unimportant as long as it preserved true religion and piety among believers.

We shall see Hodge's organizing, ecclesiastical principles in our next chapter, but we may note here an interesting departure from his idea of the true Church. He argues that among the prerogatives belonging to saints is their power to form themselves into an organized visible society and to use the prerogative of discipline to perpetuate and extend their society. He then assigns not only the exercise but the authority to discipline to that organized visible church. But he would be quick to add that their acts of discipline are only valid if in line with the universally

¹Ibid., pp. 341f. Cf. Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), pp. 383-386; Teaching Office of The Church, pp. 2-4.

²Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,..." BRPR (April, 1865), p. 276.

³Hodge, "Church of God", "Sermons", Al. Alc. at P.T.S.

⁴Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 143.

accepted scriptural terms for Church membership.¹ In the case of his own denomination, he often quoted from the Theological Institutes, by George Hill, whom he regarded as the "highest modern authority on the discipline and government" of the Presbyterian Church, to prove that the common tribunal of an organized visible church had supreme judicial, legislative and executive powers and duties.² But Hodge overlooked the fact that Hill treated the invisible and the visible Church as one and the same.³ However, with Hodge, as we have indicated, there was a big difference between the authoritative power of the invisible Church consisting of individual true believers and the assumed power of the visible Church. Hodge said that the "common sense principle adopted by every constitutional government..." has in it that the members of the State or a church society only voluntarily adopt standards and forms of government and discipline.⁴ This is why individuals are ultimately free to accept or reject the discipline of the visible Church, because they have the ultimate seat of authority and responsibility to judge, to preserve and to act according to doctrinal, Biblical truth.

¹Hodge, "Church of God", "Sermons", Al.Alc. at P.T.S.; ST, III, p. 361. Cf. Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), pp. 285-286.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), pp. 488f; "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), pp. 466n.

³See where Hill comments on the "Foundation of Church Government", Lectures In Divinity, 2 Vols. (Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1825), Vol. III, pp. 349-352.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), pp. 492f. This is not the same as rejecting the existence of the visible Church or the State, for they are both divine institutions, according to Hodge.

Hodge's views on dismissing external organization as essential to his idea of the true Church are puzzling when we consider his prolific writings on the ecclesiastical government and discipline of the American Presbyterian Church. It seems as though Hodge, by placing individual true believers as the primary subject of the prerogative to teach and to discipline, could conclude that if enough true believers constituted a visible church (e.g. Old School Presbyterian), then that visible church was an organ of the true invisible Church. One of the reasons why he wrote annual reviews on the General Assembly could have been to point out those individuals who deviated from the fundamental doctrines and who thus threatened his church from being within the true Church. This is an unrealistic view, even though Hodge admitted on several occasions that his reviews were biased and were attempts to present his own theology.¹ It could be suggested at this point that he sincerely believed that all true Christians were led by the Holy Spirit to the same knowledge of fundamental truth and thus were agreed on the principles and characteristics of Christian piety.² But has he not defined the

¹Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1835), p. 440; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1837), p. 407n; "Retrospect of the History of the Princeton Review", The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review: Index Volume from 1825 to 1868 (Philadelphia: Peter Walker, 1871), pp. 3f. As we shall see in our Section II, he actually wrote these articles in order to defend and perpetuate the particular doctrines and polity of Old School Presbyterianism.

²Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), pp. 275f.

prerogatives of the true Church, on the one hand, from a rationalistic set of Biblical doctrines, and, on the other hand, from an empirical observation of individual piety? Does this not limit the true Church's life and mission to teaching his idea of essential doctrines and to disciplining an individual's conduct?

Besides our critical handling of the way Hodge used the attributes, promises and prerogatives to argue his idea of the true Church, we may make these additional observations. He considered that the faith of the true Church rests upon the individual believer accepting a rational system of fundamental truths necessary for salvation. All other doctrines being unessential to salvation are thus unessential to the true Church. Because the Holy Spirit leads all true saints to the knowledge of this system, Hodge makes this system infallible. On this all Christians must be in common agreement and herein lies the true Church's unity, its perpetuity, and its prerogatives. But why should Hodge limit the authority of common consent among individual saints to a certain dogmatic area? He seems to mean either that the Holy Spirit teaches effectively only in this area or that these are the only intuitive, self-evident truths which each individual might validate in his own experience.

Hodge has repeatedly made piety the test of true faith. It seems that he has used the same inductive principle of causality to prove the existence of true religion as he used to prove the

existence of God.¹ If a man is conscious that he is holy, he knows that he is holy. He knows intuitively that there is efficiency in the production of effects (piety), and he attributes this efficiency to the Holy Spirit. Therefore he evidently knows the essentials of true religion which are prerequisites to holiness. Thus we can understand why Hodge always brought up the question of "moral character" or "personal piety" and wrote that the true invisible Church "is seen in the piety and in the hearts of the individual members."² The attributes must always belong to the individual true believer, because Hodge knows no other criteria to define the nature of the Church than by the character of the individual saint. Thus the life of the true Church is essentially expressed by the spiritual life of the individual, and not by the historical, visible life of the Christian community which reflects its continuous participation in the crucified but risen Christ. Likewise, the promises emphasize the spiritual and the subjective and are directed primarily toward the individual and not the visible Church. And it followed that Hodge should concentrate his polemic on the true Church's prerogatives around the idea of the individual's spiritual rights instead of the Christian community's missionary responsibilities and service.

¹Hodge, ST, I, pp. 210, 339f. See also, Address of Rev. Charles Hodge, D.D. at the Conference of Commencement Week, Saturday, April 26, 1873 (nd., n.p.), wherein Hodge said: "God in his great mercy has given us the power of intuition - the gift of seeing intuitively certain things to be true. He has impressed, in other words, certain laws of belief upon us - such laws, for example, as confidence in the veracity of our own consciousness."

²Hodge, "Sermon on Colossians 1:13", "Early Sermons, Undated", MS H6624e at P.T.S.

We must remember that his polemics, which reflect this over-emphasis on the individual and the invisible, were mainly directed toward the Romanists and the High Anglicans, whom he thought were a greater danger to the Christian religion and America than infidelity.¹ It was contended by several of Hodge's contemporaries that his strong criticisms of the Roman and Puseyite views of the visible Church caused him to overlook the intrinsic nature of the visible Christian community as the Body of Christ. John Adger, a professor of Columbia Theological Seminary, assigned such great importance to the ordered life of the Church that shortly after Hodge's death he wrote: "In his zeal against Rome's disparagement of the Invisible, and her undue exaltation of the visible as the only proper aspect in which the Church is to be considered, the Princeton Professor (Hodge) certainly ran to precisely the opposite extreme."² John Nevin attacked Hodge from a different angle by accusing him of failing to distinguish between the truth and the error in Rome's doctrine of the visible Church. As we have noted, Nevin contended that Hodge excluded the reality of Christ's Incarnation as the historical and sacramental foundation of Christ's Body projected in space and time within the visible Church.³

As we have seen, Hodge defended his concept of the true Church as the idea presented by the Bible. But for him, this idea, as all

¹Hodge, "Schaff's Protestantism", BRPR (October, 1845), pp. 629-630.

²John B. Adger, "Review of The Life of Charles Hodge, The Southern Presbyterian Review, XXXII (1881), p. 141.

³John W. Nevin, "Hodge on the Ephesians", The Mercersburg Review, IX (1857), pp. 46-83, 192-245.

theology, was based on phenomena and did not include ontology.¹ This is why he depends so heavily upon the "individual as the true ecclesiastical atom"² and then dismisses all organized visible churches as "unessential" to the true Church because of their empirical flaws. Thus the idea of holiness, unity and perpetuity and the idea of the promises and the prerogatives were both based on the individual's saving knowledge as intellectual assent to fundamental, Biblical truths followed by fruits of piety. By using this approach, Hodge's idea of the true, invisible Church could escape any conflict with the appearance of the visible Church, with society or with the State.

¹Hodge, "What is Christianity?", BRPR (January, 1860), pp. 155f; "The First and Second Adam", BRPR (April, 1860), pp. 357-367.

²Francis L. Patton, "Charles Hodge", The Presbyterian Review, II (April, 1881), p. 366.

Section II The Doctrine of the Visible Church

Chapter III The Appearance of the Visible Church

Although Hodge alluded to his idea of the true Church throughout his lifetime in numerous articles and books, it was not until the publication of his articles in the Princeton Review in 1853 that American readers saw Hodge's idea in its explicit form. Thereafter, Hodge received heavy criticism from numerous churches, including some from his own Old School Presbyterian Church, which alleged that he had "left the visible church without authority, its organization being altogether discretionary."¹ In answer to the objections, Hodge accused all who denied his idea of rejecting the true Protestant doctrine of the Church, and of being Popish with their instinct toward high-Churchism.²

Assuming that his own brethren had merely misunderstood his articles and attempting to correct others, who "in the ignorance of their reactionary zeal, seem(ed) to be going over to the Popish doctrine on the subject,"³ Hodge took the opportunity to review

¹"Dr. Hodge to H.A. Boardman" (Princeton, 1855), LCH, p. 422. Cf. "The Same to the Same" (Princeton, 1858), Ibid., p. 423; "Dr. Hodge to Bishop McIlvaine" (Princeton, 1855), Ibid., p. 418; Hodge, "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church", BRPR (April, 1855), p. 354; see our p.5,n.3.

²Hodge defined "high-churchism" as "the disposition to attribute undue importance to the external organization of the church; the desire to make everything relating thereto a matter of divine right; and to insist that no society, however orthodox and pure, can be a church unless organized in one particular form." "American Board,..." BRPR (January, 1849), p. 6. Cf. "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 341.

³Hodge, "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church", BRPR (April, 1855), p. 351.

Episcopal Bishop McInvaine's sermon, "Being of the Church", in order to show that the

'Idea of the Church,' and the 'Organization of the Church,' are two distinct subjects. The latter is not included in the former. Our previous articles related to the 'Idea or nature of the Church.' Because in reference to that subject we reproduced the doctrine of every Protestant symbol, that the Church in its idea, or essence, is the body of Christ, consisting of those united to him by faith and by the indwelling of the Spirit, and therefore might exist under any form of external organization, or without any such organization at all, it was inferred that we regard the outward organization as altogether discretionary, or as of very little importance; or that we denied¹ that the outward Church is in any sense the true Church.

Hodge insisted that these inferences were "entirely gratuitous," because (consistent with his doctrine that the true Church consists of only true believers) in the first instance, these believers are bound by divine precept, whenever practical, to unite in an outward organization following essential principles prescribed in the Word of God. In the second case, this outward or visible Church is the true Church, in the same sense, and just so far as professing believers are true believers, and not in respect to their organization.² In order to interpret Hodge's intention of consistency, we need first to understand how he viewed the intrinsic visibility of the Church.

The Nature of the Visible Church

As we have seen, one of the principles Hodge continually employed

¹Ibid., p. 354.

²Ibid., p. 355.

to describe the true Church was "Wherever the Holy Spirit is, there is the Church." From this same principle he derived the nature of the visible Church. In his 1853 article, "Visibility of the Church", Hodge argued that the Holy Spirit produces the inward principle of faith (knowledge of saving truth) and the inner quality of goodness (desire for piety) within visible men and women "in distinction from disembodied spirits or angels." These individuals then make themselves recognizable, and thus the Church visible, by their works. Therefore the Church is visible primarily in the sense in which "believers confess their faith and illustrate it by a holy life."¹ For Hodge, the visibility of the Church is that which belonged essentially to every individual true believer, because the Holy Spirit dwelt initially in him.

On the floor of the 1860 General Assembly, James H. Thornwell debated with Hodge as to whether the nature of the visible Church is based primarily on this principle. Accusing Hodge of having "a considerable slice of Quakerism" in his ecclesiology, Thornwell said, "Surely, sir, Dr. Hodge's statement that the Church is found wherever the Holy Spirit is, cannot be taken without much qualification. Does not the Holy Spirit often dwell in the heart of the solitary individual? But the Church is an organism, uniting many individuals into one body."²

¹Hodge, "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), pp. 670f. Cf. Hodge, "Draft...on the Church", MS H6624dr at P.T.S.; "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 142.

²James H. Thornwell, "Debate Touching Church-Boards," The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell, D.D., LL.D., eds. John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau, 4 Vols. (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1873), Vol. IV, pp. 232f.

When Hodge reviewed the debate in his 1860 article, "Presbyterianism," he misquoted Thornwell and then explained that his own speech said nothing against the visibility of the Church, but was simply holding forth the doctrine, "that the Spirit stands in the same relation to the church that the soul does to the body, as its organizing principle, and the source of its attributes and prerogatives."¹ But as we have seen in our former chapters, Hodge ascribed the attributes and prerogatives (initially) to individual saints. Their bond of unity or the organizing principle of the Church was derived from the Holy Spirit creating the same essential knowledge and piety in each believer.

In an article reviewing Hodge's "Presbyterianism", Thornwell assigned more importance to the visible body of the Church by offering this corrective of Hodge's dictum, "where the Spirit is, there is the Church."

The Spirit may be in individuals, or in families, or in societies, without giving to them the attributes and prerogatives of the Church. It is universally true, that where the Spirit is not, there there is no Church; but it is not universally true, that where the Spirit is, there is the Church. Something beside the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is necessary to convert a collection of believers into a Church. A dozen men may meet for purposes of prayer, and Jesus may be present in His Spirit to bless them; they may meet statedly and regularly, but all this does not make them a Church. There is an outward as well as an inward order established by law - an organization, imposed by authority, which is the condition of the healthful development of life, but not the product of that life. The outward God has adjusted to the inward, as the body to the soul. Neither springs from the other; they co-exist according to a pre-established harmony. The Word reveals the outward; the Spirit imparts the inward. Spiritual impulses do not generate the Church; they only correspond to it. The Church was made for them, as the world of sense was made for

¹Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 551.

the body. The Spirit as a principle of life, therefore, is not the source of the attributes and prerogatives of the Church. A Society that claims to be the Church must show something more than the possession of the Spirit. The Reformers always pleaded something more in their own behalf. They always insisted that they had the ministry and ordinances - that is, in its main features, the external order which Christ appointed. Without the Word, without the positive appointments of the King, without a constitution made to our hands and adapted to our spiritual needs, we should have succeeded about as well in framing a Church, even with the help of regulative principles, from our spiritual life, as the soul would have succeeded in framing a body for itself. We never could have risen above the level of Quakerism.¹

Thornwell based his argument on his belief that the Bible revealed the nature of the Church with a definite organic constitution, wherein order as well as faith determined its life.² Although he advocated a rigid jus divinum theory of church government, Thornwell was aware that the nature of the visible Church was essentially seen in the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments.³

Hodge rejected order as a mark by which to recognize the visible Church, and instead argued that "the profession of the true religion (is) the only essential criterion of the Church."⁴

John Calvin had written, "We may recognize as members of the Church those who by confession of faith, by example of life, and by

¹Thornwell, "Church Boards and Presbyterianism" (originally appeared in Southern Presbyterian Review for January, 1861), Writings of ... Thornwell, IV, pp. 261-262. Thornwell's underlining.

²Thornwell, "Debate Touching Church Boards", Writings of ... Thornwell, IV, pp. 218f.

³Thornwell, "Church Boards and Presbyterianism", Writings of ... Thornwell, IV, p. 293.

⁴Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), pp. 383f; "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 146f.

partaking of the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with us." But, unlike Hodge, he had been quick to point out that there are "plainer marks" by which the Church becomes visible - namely where "the Word of God is purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution." Because these are not without fruit, any assembly of people who hear and honor these marks can be recognized as a church.¹ Hodge did not place the same emphasis on these "distinguishing marks". If a visible Church is a congregation in which the pure word of God is preached and heard, then this would unchurch the whole world, except those who regarded their interpretations as pure.² Likewise, administration of the sacraments (even though they are the most important mode of confessing allegiance to Christ) is not essential to the nature of the visible Church, because there are people who profess the true religion who have never attended them due to external circumstances or ignorance.³ For Hodge it was sufficient to use the more general criterion of "profession of the true religion", because it acknowledged the Holy Spirit's freedom to use His saving influence regardless of the individual's participation in a church society. Wherever can be seen the minimum of doctrinal truth that can save the soul and the fruits of the Spirit, there is the visible Church catholic.⁴ This "consists of all those throughout the world,

¹Calvin, Institutes, IV, i, 8-9.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), p. 462.

³Hodge, WL, pp. 177, 192; ST, III, p. 516.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), p. 461.

that profess the true religion, together with their children."¹ In short, Hodge approached the nature of the visible Church primarily in terms of the individual's profession of faith.

One of the ways this profession can be made, "besides the general temper and deportment required by the gospel," is obedience to the "many specific duties enjoined by Christ which imply a public profession of his religion."² Foremost among these duties enjoined upon every believer is his association with other believers so as to form a visible organized church society.³ Because Hodge considered a church society primarily a means by which an individual Christian can and should profess his faith, we are led to agree with one of Hodge's critics, who wrote, "There is a visible Church, Dr. Hodge admits, but its visibility is the visibility of its individual members, not the visibility of a society or organization."⁴

¹Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 381.

²Hodge, WL, p. 175.

³This is why Hodge could insist that the Church societies have the true believers in them or the true Church is visible in the external Church, although the "two are not identical, commensurate, and conterminous." "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p. 674. "As union with the Church depends solely on union with Christ its head, by faith, and not on union with these external societies; and as union with these societies, though a duty, is not in all cases essential, of course there may be members of the Church who are not members of these societies as there are members of these societies who are not members of the Church." Hodge, "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church", BRPR (April, 1855), p. 353.

⁴"The Idea of the True Church", Edinburgh's Witness, February 29, 1860.

The Formation of Church Societies

Although Hodge does not write specifically about the formation of ecclesiastical societies, the answers as to how and why such societies are formed can be discovered through the two ways in which he saw their nature: 1) as a voluntary society and 2) as a divine institution.¹

First, a visible church from the human point of view is a voluntary society, "because an act of the will makes us members."² The decision to form or join a church must be made solely by individuals uncoerced by the state or any ecclesiastical organization. However, the "state of mind" produced in believers by the indwelling of the Spirit encourages all professors to "form themselves into societies for the propagation and culture of their spiritual nature."³ Inherent in each Christian's spiritual nature is the desire to be subject to other Christians, not merely inwardly, but outwardly.

But this subjection, which forms the church societies, is not that advocated by the Congregationalists. Hodge argued,

The ground of this subjection is not the fact that they are neighbours, and therefore is not confined to those with whom they are united in daily or weekly acts of worship. Nor does it rest on any contract or mutual covenant, so as to be limited to those to whom we may agree to obey. It is founded on the fact that they are brethren; that the Spirit of God dwells in them, and therefore extends to all the brethren. The doctrine that a church is formed by mutual

¹The actual organizational principles which Hodge employed are treated on our pp. 145f.

²Hodge, "Draft ... on the Church", MS H6624dr at P.T.S.

³Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), p. 276. Our underlining.

covenant, and that its authority is limited to those who agree together for mutual watch and care, is as inconsistent with the nature of Christianity and the word of God, as that parental authority is founded on a covenant between the parent and the children. Children are required to obey their parents, because they are parents, and not because they have covenanted to obey them. In like manner we are required to obey our brethren, because they are brethren; just as we are bound to obey the wise and good, because they are what they are; or as we are bound to obey reason and conscience, because they are reason and conscience; or God, because he is God.¹

Nevertheless, Hodge often inferred that a particular church was an "association."² He once compared a church to a college alumni-association whose actual association, although a duty and advantageous to the graduate (the true believer), was somewhat discretionary.³ He was willing to say that Christians should associate together in church societies distinguished by diversity in language, location and opinion.⁴ Besides external influences, Hodge admitted that the principle reason for the formation of separate associations was the imperfect spiritual unity among individuals. This we can take to mean the imperfect presence of the Holy Spirit. "That the indwelling of the Spirit in the members of the church, as it is the ultimate ground of its unity, so it is the cause or source of outward union in all its legitimate forms. The church is, or ought to be, one in faith, in communion, in worship, in organization, and obedience,

¹Ibid., pp. 277-278.

²Hodge, ST, III, pp. 361, 547. He avoided this term when speaking of the "catholic visible Church". Cf. "Voluntary Societies and Ecclesiastical Organizations", BRPR (January, 1837), p. 102f.

³Hodge, "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church", BRPR (April, 1855), pp. 351-352.

⁴Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), pp. 143f.

just so far, and no farther than the indwelling Spirit is productive of such union." Hodge then goes on to give the basis for Christians to associate and to form churches. "Those who are one in spirit; whose views as to doctrine, worship, and discipline are such as to admit of their harmonious co-operation, are bound to unite as one outward or visible church."¹

Although Hodge never stated it explicitly, this view gave rise to another way he considered a particular church to be formed as a voluntary society. When individual Christians had actually formed themselves into a visible society, Hodge assumed that this had occurred when they had voluntarily reached an agreement on interpreting doctrine and polity. Their harmonious association was then expressed by a confession and constitution. The life of this society, in the case of the Presbyterians, was controlled by its judicatories or church courts. Hodge referred to these as a "union by compact," wherein the form of government, worship and discipline were "voluntarily adopted" by its members, who were "bound by contract" not to violate the confession and constitution originally agreed upon at the initial formation of their society.²

There seems to be an ambiguity in Hodge's thought as to how a church is voluntarily formed. On the one hand, he denies that the "formal cause" for its formation can be anything other than the feeling of spiritual subjection induced in each Christian by the Holy Spirit. And on the other hand, his historical polemics on

¹Hodge, "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 367f.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), p. 493; "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1850), p. 470.

American Presbyterian ecclesiology assumed the ground that its members had voluntarily agreed to standards of doctrine and polity and had thus constituted it as a distinct church society, which was to perpetuate itself by requiring continued conformity among all its members to its original confession and constitution. He gives great weight to the principle of spiritual subjection as how and why churches are voluntarily formed, but it appears that when he assigns such eminence to a church as a visible association of individual Christians in harmonious agreement, he has really said that a church society is formed by contract. He tries to avoid such a conclusion by saying that a church constitution is not a "grant of powers" but a "limitation of powers" which inherently belong to the whole church (all professing Christians). But then he admits that the actual exercise of powers (which includes forming churches) is done by "compact".¹

However, Hodge asserted that there is a second and higher nature of a church when seen as a divine institution. In a lecture, he entertained the double question, "How may it be proved that the church is a (divine) society and that Christians are bound to form themselves into a society?" He then presents in outline form five points: "1) from the duties enjoined; 2) from the appointment of officers; 3) from the example of the apostles; 4) from the example of (Christ's visible) kingdom; 5) from the general consent of history."²

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), pp. 482f; "The Princeton Review on the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), p. 642; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1850), p. 470. See our pp. 225f.

²Hodge, "Draft...on the Church", MS H6624dr at P.T.S.

Although there is no elaboration of the above points in Hodge's manuscript, we will use these categories to display from other sources how he considered a voluntary church to be a divinely instituted society as well.

1) "God has imposed duties upon his people which render it necessary for them thus to associate in a visible organized body. They are to unite in his worship; in teaching and propagating his truth; in testifying for God in all ages and in all parts of the world."¹ In other writings, Hodge lists various aspects of these duties assigned to Christians so as to include: "the admission and exclusion of members," "the mutual watch and care," "the exercise of discipline," "the maintenance and protection of the truth," "the institution of church government," "the administration of the sacraments," "to announce and enforce by moral means the law of God," and "the education and selection of ministers."²

Although the obedience of these duties is not absolutely necessary for salvation, all professing Christians are under strong moral obligation to obey them because they are divine commands.³

¹Hodge, Sf, III, pp. 547-548.

²Hodge, ST, II, p. 604; ST, III, p. 361; "Voluntary Societies and Ecclesiastical Organizations", BRPR (January, 1837), p. 113; "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), pp. 673-674; "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 381; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), p. 617; "Principles of Church Union",... , BRPR (April, 1865), pp. 276-277.

³Hodge, ST, III, p. 516. It is interesting to note that Hodge saw a similarity between the "obligation of moral law" and "obligations and responsibilities" incurred by "all those who profess the true religion together with their children." Both were permanent and could never be withdrawn from, although the discharge of such obligations was voluntary. "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1848), p. 412.

These duties are enjoined on each Christian, but because the exercise of them must normally be done in connection with other Christians, there arises the necessity of a church society. Hence, God has willed the institution of an organized, visible church by prescribing such duties.

In another line of thought in Hodge's writing, the duties enjoined and thus the divine instituting of the church society seem to be a result of Christ's commission recorded in Matthew 28: 19-20 and Mark 16:15. The commission was given to the whole Church and "wakens a thrill in every heart. Every Christian feels that the command is addressed to a body of which he is a member, and that he has a personal obligation to discharge."¹ Here it appears that Hodge has assumed that the whole visible Church is already formed into visible societies to which the commission is then addressed. But such is not consistent with his contention that the commission is "founded on the gift of the Spirit,"² and that the Holy Spirit dwells initially in each believer. This makes the commission actually addressed to all professing Christians regardless of their relationship to a church body. This is why Christ's command "binds their conscience, which they cannot neglect without renouncing the authority of Christ, and thereby proving that they are destitute of his Spirit and are none of his."³ But the duties imposed by the

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", Appendix I in A.A. Hodge, A Commentary on the Confession of Faith with Question for Theological Students and Bible Classes, ed. N.H. Gould (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1870), p. 406.

²Hodge, "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), p. 370.

³Ibid.

commission are of such a nature that Christians must

organize themselves as a society. In what form this organization shall be made has always been a matter of doubt; and whether any one form is prescribed in the Scriptures is also a subject of debate. But it is on all hands conceded that the people of God are bound to organize themselves, under some form, in order to accomplish the great purpose for which the Church was constituted. It is as an organized society she is to judge of the qualification of new members, and exercise discipline on unworthy ones; that she is to select, ordain, and install pastors, and send out evangelists. There are then some of the most important of all the means for evangelizing the world, which can be employed by the church in her organized capacity only.¹

2) Further proof that a church is a divine society is the fact that God has appointed church officers, not the people, to execute these duties. He has "specified their qualifications, their prerogatives, and the mode of their appointment."² God has also enacted laws by which these officers govern the society. The fact that the duties are given to all Christians is not inconsistent with there being officers to carry them out, because "God is not the author of confusion, but of order and peace in all the churches of the saints. The absence of order, subordination, and peace in any body is an evidence of the absence of the Spirit of God."³ Besides, argued Hodge,

the representative principle which pervades the Bible, and which has its foundation in the nature of man, is also founded in the nature of the Church, and is necessarily involved in her organization. As it is physically impossible that all the people should assemble for the administration of

¹Hodge, "Voluntary Societies and Ecclesiastical Organizations", BRPR (January, 1837), p. 103.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 548.

³Hodge, "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), p. 370.

government and discipline, it is a matter of necessity that the power of the Church should be exercised through its properly appointed representatives - so that this organic outward union of the Church, as the expression of its inward spiritual unity,¹ becomes feasible, and has to a large extent been actual.

It seems that Hodge concluded that if God has made this arrangement, church societies must be divine institutions which Christians should form or join. Hodge cited that the first Christian society had officers, and laws of government and conduct, and commented, "Provision was thus made, by divine authority, for the Church assuming the form of an external visible society."²

3) This leads us to see how Hodge drew on the example of the apostles to verify the divine instituting of church society. The apostles were commissioned by Christ to go about infallibly teaching His doctrine. People who heard their teaching and met the conditions of repentance and belief formed themselves into societies under the direction of the apostles. Thus the believers in Jerusalem were externally united in worship, in doctrine and in fellowship under the same teaching and ruling apostles. As the apostles scattered abroad preaching, the believers in every place associated in separate, although not independent, churches. All individuals and congregations remained subject to the apostles who exercised general jurisdiction over the whole Church. Hence, by the teaching and ruling example of the apostles, we can see that God instituted separate church societies within one catholic Church. The divine

¹Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), p. 278.

²Hodge, "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p. 674.

sanction for the apostles, thus externally uniting Christians, arose from the nature of their office. "Having been commissioned to found and organize the (catholic) Church, and being so filled with the Spirit as to render them infallible, their word was law. Their inspiration necessarily secured this universal authority."¹

Hodge contended that such a "bond of external union" ceased with the apostolic office. Therefore, Christians are not obligated to join a church society like the Roman Catholic Church, which claims that through apostolic succession it has the necessary infallible and universal authority which makes her the only divinely instituted church society. What we do have now is the universal authority of scripture, which records the doctrines and example of the apostles in setting up separate churches and which is the "written constitution" of any church.²

Hodge warns us that there is a difference between saying a visible church is a divine institution and its organization is divinely instituted. The example of the apostles in forming church societies can not be exactly conformed to, because "their example was not uniform." This is seen in how "they varied the details of church organization to suit the circumstances of particular places and occasions."³ Denouncing Protestant "high churchism", Hodge observed that the apostles never gave order or worship as much

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 417.

²Ibid., p. 400.

³Hodge, "Rights of Ruling Elders", BRPR (April, 1843), pp. 320f.

importance as doctrine when they founded churches. And neither should present day Christians, for this would be "making the body the same as the soul."¹ We may draw only general principles from the apostles' example as to how church societies are formed.

4) When Hodge turned to the example of the kingdom to prove that the church is a divine society which Christians must form, his intention was to show that Christ made provision for a visible kingdom and that He is its governing Head. We recall that Hodge spoke of Christ's kingdom as both the true Church and the visible Church.² He seemed to say that Christ provided the latter to take the form of visible societies as a subordinate or accidental occurrence - so that the former could exist without the latter.

He (Christ) taught that it (the true Church) was to be a spiritual kingdom, that it was to have its seat in the heart, its Sovereign being the invisible God in Christ; its laws such as relate to the conscience; its service the obedience of faith; its rewards eternal life. It is true he imposed upon his people the duty of confession and other obligations which implied their manifestation to the world, and their external union among themselves. But these are mere incidents.³

However, Hodge also made the significance of these duties and obligations the very basis for arguing "that there is and must be a visible kingdom of Christ in the world" and that the visible churches into which professing Christians form themselves are thus divinely sanctioned constituents of that kingdom.⁴ The point Hodge seems to make is, "The (visible) kingdom of Christ was organized immediately

¹Hodge, "Debate Touching Church Boards", Writings of...Thornwell IV, p. 229.

²See our pp.64f.

³Hodge, "Idea of the Church", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 387. Our underlining.

⁴Hodge, ST, II, p. 604.

by God, for the promotion of religious objects";¹ that is, no mediate Christian community is necessary for the formation of a church society. It appears that he makes all depend upon the professor's immediate sense of religious obligation coupled with an awareness that Christ as "absolute sovereign" and only Head of the visible Church catholic once set up certain laws which continue to require and to regulate the associating of Christians in distinct church societies.

It should also be noted that Hodge did not interpret Christ's purpose for instituting churches as being "the promotion of the temporal well-being of society," for this was the purpose of the state under the control of God's providence.² But we shall see later that Hodge recognized that the organized church, although formed to teach the gospel, also had the right to declare and enforce the moral laws of God when individuals or nations ignored such.³

5) Hodge's last proof that a church society is divinely instituted was his appeal to the common consciousness and actions of Christians throughout history. This is simply a repetition of the argument that wherever the Holy Spirit dwells, he will produce in the individual believer a desire to express his inward unity of faith and love through outward union and subjection. Hodge pointed out that whenever in history there had been persecutions or disorder

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³See our pp. 136f, 271f.

in visible churches and Christians were scattered for years, eventually they, or their descendents, or some other believers, would join together to form a church society to worship God, to observe the sacraments, to exercise discipline, etc.¹

Hence, a church society must be a divine institution if God gave to Christians a spiritual principle which results in outward union. Hodge compared this to what he called

a nisus formativus; an inward force, by which it is impelled to assume the form suited to its nature. This inward impulse may by circumstances be impeded or misdirected, so that the normal state of a plant or animal may never be attained. Still, this force never fails to manifest its existence, or the state to which it tends. What is thus true in nature is no less true in the Church. There is nothing more conspicuous in history than the law by which believers are impelled to express their inward unity by outward union.²

From what Hodge has said thus far, we might make these further observations. a) His over-all approach as to how and why church societies are formed is anthropocentric. His concern has been with what individuals have to do and not with what God has done in Christ for the community. This over-emphasis on the obedience of the individual tends to make the actual formation of a church society dependent on man's decision. Then this is conditioned by what is virtually a quantitative view of the Spirit's influence. Nevin rejected this whole approach when he wrote,

The Church (society) is no congregation merely of persons professing Christianity, brought together in an outward way, the result in such view of private and separate piety supposed to be brought to pass under such form on the outside of its communion. It is a living constitution which starts from Christ himself, in virtue of his resurrection from the dead, forms the home of the Spirit

¹Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (October, 1856), pp. 699f.

²Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 417.

in the world, and includes in itself powers altogether above nature for the accomplishment of its heavenly ends.... It (the Church) is the form in which he (Christ) reveals his presence among men through the Spirit and the organ by which he carries into effect the purposes of his grace.¹

b) Our second observation is that there seems to be a lack of real continuity between the life of the original society and the church societies of history, other than the general principles established by the example of the apostles. Thus when he speaks of God instituting a church society with precepts, laws and officers as revealed in the New Testament, he seems to regard these as "guides and sanctions" to the "spontaneous tribute of every Christian heart."² Christ's continuing Kingship over church societies seems to be obscured by laws and precepts. Even Hodge's use of the Holy Spirit as the organizing principle seems to disconnect the church society from the life of earlier Christian communities in space and time.

c) Hodge's doctrine of the formation, continued existence and fulfillment of the visible Church lacks both the eschatological dimension and the ontological foundation of the Church as presented in the New Testament. He does not adequately interpret the Church as the Body of Christ in terms of Christ's assumption of our humanity in the Incarnation, nor yet in terms of our participation through the Spirit in the living Head, in whom our humanity has been sanctified by His life, death and resurrection. The Church on earth

¹These comments were made by Nevin on Ephesians 1: 22-23 in his sermon, "The Christian Ministry", The Mercersburg Theology, ed. James H. Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 363-364. Hodge, on this same scripture, wrote only of the invisible Church. Hodge, E, pp. 85-92.

²Hodge, UL, p. 176.

is united by the Spirit to her ascended Lord, and is the sphere where Christ by His Spirit exercises His continuing ministry and works out His purposes in history. The corporateness of the Church is thus grounded in the Person and life of the Head of the Body - and not in the organizing activity of the members as individuals. Though in this way founded on the Incarnation, it is not an extension of the Incarnation, for this would make the ontological relationship reversible. While Nevin fell err to this problem,¹ Hodge never considered that the Incarnation had introduced a "new creation" on which all churches are founded and in which all churches participate.² He was unaware that a church as a member of His Body can and should provisionally manifest this new creation within the old, while moving with all its visible community life together with other churches toward the awaited fulfillment of the whole Church in Christ. Void of the dynamics of this eschatological tension, Hodge seemed to regard church societies as formed by the static accumulation of Christians in a temporary group whereby they harmoniously cultivate their own religious nature and dutifully teach God's doctrinal truths.

d) It is clear that Hodge saw that the Christian performed his

¹Nevin, "Introduction" and his August 8, 1844 Sermon, "Catholic Unity", found in Philip Schaff, The Principle of Protestantism as related to the Present State of the Church, (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: "Publication Office" of the German Reformed Church, 1845), pp. 19f, 199f.

²Hodge, "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), pp. 175-190; "What is Christianity?", BRPR (January, 1860), pp. 155f.

duties of public profession in the context of a church society. The organized church then is formed for a unique work which no other society or group should undertake. Thus it can be distinguished from the family, which has the sole duty of domestic training; from the State, which has the unique duty of the temporal well-being of the nation; and from any benevolent voluntary associations, which may by secular means attempt morally to improve the social community.¹ Hodge therefore considered it highly important for the "well being and purity of the (visible universal) Church"² that there should be organized church societies formed by Christians, who are committed to obey these divinely prescribed duties.

This is why he also contended that any group of men who had formed themselves into such a church should be regarded "as a constituent part of the visible Church catholic" with full powers to carry out these enjoined duties.³ But Hodge added, "It is one thing to recognize the possession of certain rights (duties) by a particular body, and another to endorse the wisdom or the propriety of the exercise of those rightful powers in any given case."⁴ This leads us to see what Hodge thought was the best way to exercise these powers which accompany the duties.

¹Hodge, "The Church of God", "Sermons", MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S.; "Relation of the Church and the State", BRPR (October, 1863), pp. 691f; "Voluntary Societies and Ecclesiastical Organizations", BRPR (January, 1837), pp. 103-120.

²Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 384.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 385.

The Principles of Organization for a Church Society

Assuming that professing Christians had formed themselves into separate church societies, Hodge set forth those principles of ecclesiastical polity which he considered to be "prescribed"¹ in the Bible, and yet as having "an elasticity which admits of their being suited to every change of circumstances."² These principles are: "(1) That the people have a right to a substantial part in the government of the Church; (2) That presbyters, who minister in word and doctrine, are the highest permanent officers of the Church, and all belong to the same order; (3) That the outward and visible Church is, or should be, one, in the sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole."³

Before analyzing Hodge's explanation of these, we should note his somewhat inconsistent thoughts on how they have a jure divino nature. When writing his 1855 article defending the exclusive distinction between the "Idea of the Church" and the "Organization of the Church", Hodge admitted that there was a

great diversity of opinion as to how far the mode of external organization is prescribed in the Scriptures. Some hold that nothing is absolutely enjoined on this subject, but that the Church is at liberty to assume what outward government she deems best suited to her circumstances. She may be Congregational, Presbyterian, or Prelatical, just as she sees fit, according to the saying of Stillingfleet, 'Government is of God, the form of man;' and according to the analogy of civil governments, which may rightfully assume the democratical, aristocratical, or monarchical form, as the people may determine. Secondly, others hold that while Christ

¹Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 547.

²Hodge, "American Board,..." BRPR (January, 1849), p. 11.

³Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 400.

has prescribed certain principles relating to the organization of the Church, he has left much, as to the details, discretionary. This is the common opinion of Protestants, and especially of Presbyterians; and whether recognized in thesi or not, is practically acted upon by every religious denomination on earth. Thirdly, others again hold that everything in the government or polity of the Church is prescribed in the Scriptures; that the Church has no more discretion in this matter than she has in matters of doctrine; and that whatever is not enjoined, and, therefore,¹ obligatory jure divino, is forbidden and unlawful.

Then Hodge goes on to contradict what he implied was his view (i.e. the second opinion). "Any of these theories of Church government is consistent with the Protestant doctrine as to the nature of the Church.... All that that doctrine requires, is that we hold that the Church is independent of all forms of external organization. She may exist under any form, or in the persons of scattered believers."² But a few days after this article appeared and Hodge had been criticized as having held Stillingfleet's doctrine, "Government of God, the form of man," Hodge wrote a letter to a friend claiming that he held no such doctrine and asserting that in his seminary lectures on ecclesiology, he had all along attempted to prove a jure divino ground for "certain principles relating to the organization of the Church which were obligatory as matters of divine precept...."³ In this letter and especially in

¹Hodge, "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church", BRPR (April, 1855), pp. 353-354.

²Ibid., p. 354.

³"Dr. Hodge to H.A. Boardman" (Princeton, April 13, 1855), LCH, p. 422. Our underlining. Hodge had started lecturing on the nature of the Church and its polity in 1846, replacing Samuel Miller, who was declining in health. Ibid., p. 418. He continued this position

his address, "What Is Presbyterianism?", delivered before the Presbyterian Historical Society on May 1 of the same year, Hodge all but eliminated any other theory of church organization but his own as coming from the Bible. By the time of his 1860 article, "Presbyterianism", Hodge insisted that his principles of organization were "jure divino"; that is, that they are clearly taught in the word of God and intended to be of universal and perpetual obligation."¹ Hodge reasoned, "There are fixed laws assigned by God, according to which all healthful and normal development of the (human) body is regulated. So it is with regard to the church. There are fixed laws in the Bible, according to which all healthful development and action of the external church are determined."² He contended that these three laws were also the "fundamental principles of Presbyterianism, in such sense as that those who hold those principles in their true intent are Presbyterians, and that those who deny them forfeit their claim to be so regarded."³

This seems to conflict with what Hodge argued above about any

Contd.]

until the appointment of Alexander T. McGill as Professor of Ecclesiastical, Homiletic, and Pastoral Theology in 1854. BRPR: Index Vol. p. 243. There had been some, unhappy with Hodge's lectures on the Church, calling them both "dangerous and un-Presbyterian." "Princeton Lectures on Church Government", Presbyterian (a weekly Philadelphia newspaper), October 8, 1853. This feeling could have been fostered by Hodge's BRPR articles on the Church of the same period.

¹Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 553.

²Ibid., p. 552.

³Ibid., p. 553.

theory of church organization being consistent with the nature of the Church. However, we must remember that he does not relate the nature and the organization of the Church. Because the latter is unessential to salvation, it is not essential to the being of the Church. The point Hodge wished to make is that neither a church society nor a particular form of organization are absolutely essential, but when believers do associate into a society (to perform certain religious duties for the well-being of their religious nature), then they must follow three divine precepts or principles.

Hodge argued that these principles counteracted what he considered to be the errors in Romanism, High Church Anglicanism or Congregationalism. These errors were: "(1.) That all Church power rests in the clergy; (2.) That the apostolic office is perpetual; (3.) That each individual Christian congregation is independent."¹ Implicit in Hodge's thought is the idea that Presbyterianism combines the necessary corrective principles and thus is the only properly organized church society.

But because the principles are by their nature general as well as jure divino, Hodge argued that there is a "wide discretion allowed

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 400. It should be noted that Hodge never directly used his principles to attack the theories of Erastianism or Quakerism. He simply set these "aside"; because the former taught, "the Church is only one form of the State", and because the latter did "not provide for the external organization of the Church." Ibid., p. 399. Nevertheless, Hodge once called the Quakers "an organized society." Hodge, ST, I, p. 88. Also it is evident in his discussion of the nature of church power that he used Erastianism as a foil to clarify his own theory.

us by God, in matters of detail" concerning ecclesiastical organization and action.¹ It was over this principle of discretion that Hodge and Thornwell had one of their most caustic ecclesiastical battles. This was precipitated by the question of whether the Presbyterian Church could create church boards with delegated power to carry out its missionary work. The development of this controversy will be presented in our next chapter, but here we note that Hodge contended that only three principles of polity can be deduced from scripture. Beyond these and in fidelity to them, professing Christians are free to choose for their church society whatever methods, organs or agencies they think will be most expedient to perform effectually their religious duties in accordance with their varying circumstances, whether these arise from settled or frontier Christian communities or in heathen lands.

Not to have this principle of wide discretion, Hodge argued, would be impracticable, unscriptural and suicidal, for there would be no schools, colleges, theological seminaries, missionaries or agencies to advance God's kingdom. He appeared to base this principle on his beliefs: 1) that a "Thus saith the Lord" cannot be found in the Bible for any details of an organized church. To attempt to do this would be converting the Christian Church into a Hebrew Church. 2) The liberty of faith and action for many things not taught or commanded in scripture is the "liberty with which Christ has made us free" or the freedom of conscience each Christian

¹Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), pp. 563f, 552f.

has a right to exercise. 3) Involved in the very "idea of a society" as seen in the examples of churches and states in history is the right of self-government - that is, "all power is, in sensu primo, in the people", and not in the clergy only, in the church society itself or in the state. Therefore, Christians are free, within three prescribed ecclesiastical principles, to participate in and adapt their church society as their conscience directs them in their peculiar circumstances.¹ However, Hodge asserted, "All such modifications are matters of indifference. They cannot be made to bind the conscience, nor can they be rendered conditions of Christian or ecclesiastical fellowship."² The organization of the Church can not be "a matter of faith", but a matter of discretion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, free conscience and the three scriptural principles of church polity.³

¹Ibid., pp. 547-548, 552-553, 563-567; Hodge, "Debate Touching Church Boards", Printings of ...Thornwell, IV, pp. 228-231; "American Board,...", BRPR (January, 1849), pp. 6-7; "Draft... on the Church", MS H6624dr at P.T.S.

²Hodge, ST, II, p. 606.

³Hodge, "From the Assembly", The Presbyterian (May 30, 1860).

Chapter IV The Powers of a Church Society

"The people have a right to a substantial part in the government of the Church"¹

The Nature of the People's Ecclesiastical Power

This principle is discussed by Hodge primarily in terms of church power and authority. But first, we need to understand the nature of power and authority before expounding the categories of power which show the ways people participate in church government. Hodge wrote,

As to the nature of Church power, it is to be remembered that the Church is a Theocracy. Jesus Christ is its head; all power is derived from him; his Word is our written constitution. All Church power is therefore, properly ministerial and administrative. Everything is to be done in the name of Christ and in accordance with his directions.²

In his Systematic Theology, Hodge seems to contend that the seat of church power is in Christ as "absolute sovereign" or authority over all. He said that church power is "derived from Christ" and is not vested "ultimately in the people or in the clergy" or in the State.³

There was no doubt in Hodge's mind that Christ is the absolute authority of the Church, but it seems that he viewed this mainly as

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 400.

²Ibid.

³Hodge, ST, II, pp. 605-606. Cf. Hodge, II C, p. 240.

an abstract authority over the visible Church catholic. Instead of speaking of Christ as the present source of power for concrete Christian societies, whereby Christ retains his authority by also continually presiding Himself in all the decisions and actions of His Church, Hodge preferred to speak of "the Spirit of God, who is the source of all power,"¹ thus allowing him to defend his first principle of polity. "All Church power arises from the indwelling of the Spirit; therefore those in whom the Spirit dwells are the seat of Church power." In order to denounce the Romanists for holding that the Spirit was given only to the clergy to the exclusion of the people, he offered the second half of the "syllogism": "But the Spirit dwells in the whole Church; and therefore the whole Church is the seat of Church power."² This is why he repeatedly said, "The turning point between Protestants and Romanists, (is) that all Church power rests ultimately in the whole Church, and not in the clergy, much less in the bishops."³ In his effort to correct Rome, Hodge appeared to make the seat of Church power all individual professing Christians who constitute the whole visible Church.

If there be anything from the whole tenor of the New Testament, and from innumerable explicit declarations of the Word of God, it is that the Spirit dwells in the whole body of Christ; that he guides all his people into the knowledge of the truth; that every believer is taught of God, and has the witness in himself, and has no need that any should teach him, but the anointing which abideth in him teacheth him all things.⁴

¹Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 555.

²Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 405.

³Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 400. Our underlining.

⁴Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 405.

Because Hodge equated all power with the Holy Spirit, and as he held that the Spirit does not dwell in organized church societies as such but in individuals, then the seat of church power must be ultimately in the individual Christian. This is why he also insisted that the constitutional power of a church society is a "limitation of powers," and not a "grant of powers," because power was already inherent in those individuals as part of the visible Church catholic prior to their forming a church society.¹

With this subjective dimension of the source and seat of church power, it can be understood why Hodge used what he called the "principle of liberty" to argue that all Christians have the "right to a substantial part in the government of the Church."² For him, power conveyed authority to and imposed obligation upon the Christian to assert and exercise his right. Thus a Christian is not bound to passive obedience to clergy or to ecclesiastical bodies in matters of faith or practice. Instead, he is free and has the rightful authority to take part in the decision of all questions relating to order, worship, discipline and doctrine.³

This is why the pre-eminence of the right and authority of the individual's free conscience is revealed continuously in Hodge's

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), pp. 481-483.

²Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 401.

³It is interesting to note that Hodge attributed civil liberty to this idea of religious liberty. He argued that when the Reformation brought people to the consciousness of the power and right which they primarily possessed over against the hierarchy of Rome, they also discovered that all civil power was vested in them and not in kings, nobles, or magistrates. "If there be liberty in the Church, there will be liberty in the State." Ibid., p. 401.

discussions on church power. Christians must be allowed the liberty "to decide with what church they will connect themselves, and how long that connection shall continue, subject only to their responsibility to God."¹ Only the conscience can be "the judge" as to the correctness of and obedience due to any actions or deliverances of church officers or bodies with which he has connection. The "standard" by which a Christian makes his judgment is the Bible, which alone has infallible authority in all matters of conscience - including both faith and morals.²

This leads us to the first aspect of the twofold "principle of order", which Hodge contended accompanied the "principle of liberty" so as to regulate the power and rights of the people. First, the people are "restricted in the exercise" of their powers by the "Word of God, which bends the reason, heart and conscience. We only cease to be the servants of men that we may be the servants of God. We are raised into a higher sphere, where perfect liberty is merged in absolute subjection... to an authority legitimate and divine." The Church does not become a "mob", in which every man is a law unto himself, free to believe and free to do what he pleases. Instead, the powers vested in Christians must be exercised according to the recorded law of God.³ "We have no security (order), but in the principle that the SS (sacred scriptures) are the only infallible

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 449.

²Hodge, "The Princeton Review and the State of the Country and the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), pp. 647-648.

³Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", pp. 401-402.

rule of faith and practice. Its decisions and directions are in no case, and on no pretense to be departed from."¹ When Hodge wrote of the authority of scripture "limiting" the powers and authority of Christians in a church society, he was actually contending that the Bible guided or ordered church power in the same way the written constitution ordered the powers of the state.²

According to our theory of civil government all power resides in the people. Legislative bodies and executive officers are delegates of the people and possess no prerogatives not specially granted to them. Our written constitutions, therefore, national and state, are the measure of the power confided to the public servants of all classes.³

Not the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A., but the Bible, which is the true written constitution of all church societies, is the sole authoritative measure of church powers granted to all professing Christians by the Holy Spirit.

Before Hodge spelled out the nature and jurisdiction of the various powers granted to the people by the Bible,⁴ he first set out the second part of the "principle of order" - the people's court representatives.

Although Christians possess divinely given church power, they

¹Hodge, "Church of God", "Sermons", MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S. Hodge intended for the word "only" here to dismiss the authority of tradition, church societies, clergy, the state, public opinion or anything which would usurp the finality of the Biblical laws or coerce the private judgment. Cf. Hodge, "Rule of Faith", BRPR (October, 1842), pp. 622f; ST, I, pp. 182f.

²Hodge, "Draft...on the Church", MS H6624dr and "Church of God", "Sermons", MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S.

³Hodge, "The Princeton Review and the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), pp. 641-642. Our underlining.

⁴Cf. our pp. 169f.

only exercise their powers through their representatives. Hodge argued that "the exercise of it (the power of the church) is in the hands of legitimate officers. The Church is not a vast democracy, where everything is decided by popular vote."¹ He noted that the Westminster Confession said: "The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate."² But Hodge did not go back to the original Westminster Form of Government when he considered the names of these church officers. Instead he accepted unquestioningly the American Presbyterian's listing of the "ordinary and perpetual" church officers, which substituted the phrase, "the representatives of the people, usually styled Ruling Elders", for the Westminster term, "other church governors."³ The significance of this American republican idea of the eldership as the "representatives of the people" was used by Hodge to support his "principle of popular control", whereby the people may take part in church government.⁴ The power of a church constantly inheres

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 402.

²Ibid., Cf. "Confession of Faith", Chap. XXX, Sec. I, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1904), p. 129.

³"The Form of Government: Adopted, 1788, Amended, 1805-1901", Chap. III, Sec. II, Constitution of Presbyterian Church in U.S.A., p. 354; "The Form of Presbyterian Church Government and of Ordination of Ministers; agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, with the Assistance of Commissioners from the Church of Scotland", The Confession of Faith; (and other documents) (Glasgow: Francis Orr & Sons, 1845), p. 348.

⁴Hodge, "The Elder Question", retitled as "Warrant and Theory of Ruling Eldership" in The Church and Its Polity, ed. by William Durant (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1879), p. 262.

in the people, but by their elected representatives their power is represented in what the elders do or say, so that the people are represented as having done or said the same.

These two principles of popular control and of the exercises of the power which belongs to the people through representatives chosen by themselves, gives to Presbyterianism its distinctive character. In our system the people have not only the right to elect their own church officers, but they have controlling influence in the government of the Church; exercising that influence through the elders, who are their representatives. This is the distinctive character of the eldership.¹

Thornwell contended that Hodge's first principle of polity "savours strongly of Independency".² A closer examination of Hodge's theory of eldership reveals a certain element of truth in this accusation. First, it appears that in Hodge's mind the office of ruling elder is mainly one of convenience and expediency and only indirectly of divine warrant. Second, the functions of the elder are sacred and necessary merely because the people, whom they represent, are commanded by God to exercise the power of governing a church society and are upbraided when unfaithful or negligent in the discharge of this duty.³

Although it might be possible in a small congregation for the brotherhood to act immediately, yet in such a city as Jerusalem, where there were five or ten thousand believers, it was impossible that government or discipline should be administered by the whole body of Christians. And when the churches of a province or a nation, or of all Christendom, united for the decision of question of general interest, the people must appear by their representatives or not appear at all.⁴

¹Ibid.

²Thornwell, "Church Boards and Presbyterianism", Writings of... Thornwell, IV, pp. 291, 269-279.

³Cf. our pp. 134f.

⁴Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 555.

In consequence of the impossibility of people appearing in mass, the ruling elder, for Hodge, became their deputy or representative. Thornwell said this would make the elder "the mere organ of the people. Their will is his law....(But) every ruler is a man solemnly appointed to seek and execute the will of the Master."¹

But from the method Hodge employed throughout his ecclesiology, it was necessary for him to view the ruling elder as the exponent of the divinely given power inherent in all individual Christians in a church society. This was his way of avoiding "clerical despotism". The nature of the office of the ruling elder has "value" because the elder is a "layman" and as such he has "real power" distinctive from that of the clergy.² This is why the clergy cannot exercise the powers of order, worship, discipline or doctrine "without the consent of the people" who are represented by their elders.³ By insisting that ruling elders are laymen and are chosen by the people "to act in their name what they are entitled to do in their own persons; or rather, to exercise the powers which radically inhere in those for whom they act,"⁴ Hodge seems to be making the consent of the people the condition upon which the lawfulness of the acts of the church officers is suspended, and as necessary an element in any judgment of a church society as the decisions of the rulers

¹Thornwell, Writings of ...Thornwell, pp. 275, 277.

²Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), pp. 559-560.

³Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", pp. 403-404.

⁴Ibid., p. 402.

themselves seeking the will of God. Although Hodge does not explicitly admit it, this is one step away from the Congregation theory of the Church, and would also imply that the people have the right to instruct and control their rulers in addition to choosing them.¹ But Hodge tried to protect himself from going this far by arguing,

It is no part of our presbyterianism that God's people govern themselves, any more than that a family governs itself. In other words, in the Christian church, as in a Christian family, the power and authority of the rulers do not come from the people, but from Christ. He committed the power to teach and rule to certain officers; and directed them to communicate the same authority to others. All the power they have comes from Him; the power goes with the commission, which is received in each case from the officers and not from the members of the church. This is just as true in the case of ruling elders as of ministers.

However, he then goes on to add:

The authority to exercise the power inherent in their respective offices, over any congregation depends on the will of that congregation, but not the power itself. If I am ordained a minister of the gospel, I have no authority over any congregation that does not choose me as their pastor, or that does not voluntarily subject itself to the presbytery of which I am a member. Whether this is republicanism or not, we do not know, and are not careful to enquire, seeing we are persuaded it is the order which Christ has established in his own house for edification and not for destruction.²

We have to realize that the method of establishing the divine warrant of the office of the ruling elder, according to Hodge, was different from that of the clergy. The minister, as we shall see under the second principle of polity, had church power arising from his divine

¹Hodge, "The Elder Question", pp. 264-265.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 447-448.

office. But Hodge viewed the divine warrant for the eldership as evolving out of the powers, authority, rights and functions divinely given and attached to all individual Christians. That is, the elders had inherent power, not because God specifically instituted their office as such, but because God had given the people, whom they represent, the power of the Holy Spirit and the authority to govern themselves as opposed to clerical domination or state control.

It is a generally recognized principle, that inherent, as opposed to delegated powers, may be exercised either by those in whom they inhere, or by their representatives. The powers inherent in the people, they may exercise themselves, or delegate to those whom they choose to act in¹ their stead... acting in their name and by their authority.

Thus the necessity and function of the eldership is to allow the people to govern themselves. In short, the New Testament prescribes as the first principle of church organization, "The right of the people to take part in the government of the church. Hence the divine right of the office of Ruling Elders, who appear in all church courts as representatives of the people."²

Robert Dabney contended that Hodge's method of establishing the divine warrant for the office and functions of the ruling elders left them as "simple laymen" after their appointment, and that they were "mere incidentals; very convenient and useful ones, indeed,

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 402, 409. Our underlining.

²LCH, p. 419. Charles A. Briggs of Union Theological Seminary, New York, suggested that such a view of ruling elders had "no claim to be jure divino, but only jure humano." Briggs, Whither?: A Theological Question for the Times (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1889), p. 37.

but still incidentals." He argued that

the ruling elders are scriptural *πρεσβύτεροι* and *ἐπίσκοποι*; that they should have a presbyterial ordination by laying on of hands - in the parochial presbytery, the church session - and that in all powers of inspection and rule they are co-ordinate with preaching elders, and have the same divine warrant for their authority.

Although these functions of the ruling elder are "not of equal importance and utility" as those of the ministers' unique functions of preaching and administering the sacraments, they are nevertheless "as truly sacred, as truly of divine appointment, and as truly essential to the church's spiritual state." Dabney, among numerous others, contended that if the ruling elder's office and function is not so regarded, then the government of the church would become hierarchial, and could lead to the exclusive control by the clergy.¹

¹Robert L. Dabney, "Theories of the Eldership", Discussions: Evangelical and Theological (First published in Richmond, Virginia, 1890), 2 Vols., (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), Vol. II, pp. 135, 150f. This article was written in 1860, the same year in which Princeton Seminary sought Dabney, who was then a professor at Union Seminary in Richmond, Va., for their chair of Church History. Hodge had recommended Dabney, thinking that they shared the same ecclesiology. In a letter to George Pitts, March, 1860, Hodge wrote, "Dr. Dabney I am told at one time sympathized with the 'critic' published in Baltimore; but all that has passed away and those who know him say that he would not be at variance with our Board of Directors on any important ecclesiastical question." Cited in Elwyn Allen Smith, The Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture: A Study in Changing Concepts, 1700-1900 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 179n. Hodge was mistaken, and Dabney declined the Princeton chair. The "critic" to which Hodge was referring was Robert J. Breckinridge, who was the first person to point out the possibility of "irresponsible clerical domination" that could come from a continuation of a low view of elder's ordination and position. For a discussion of Breckinridge's 1843 publication, Presbyterian Government, Not a Hierarchy, but a Commonwealth: and Presbyterian Ordination, Not a Charm, but an Act of Government, and his 1845 The Christian Pastor, in which he charged the General Assembly, the church boards and Princeton Seminary of clericalism, see Ibid.,

[Contd.]

This fear was not unfounded. Their polemics were precipitated by the actions taken by the 1842 and 1843 General Assemblies, which Hodge heartily supported. The General Assembly voted that ruling elders should be continually excluded from the laying on of hands in the ordination of ministers.¹ Hodge contended that ordination was an executive power and act exclusively inherent to the office of the clergy, and therefore does not pertain either to the ruling elder or to any court of the church.² The General Assembly also ruled that a quorum of a presbytery should consist of three ordained ministers, omitting the Constitutional phrase "and as many elders as may be present belonging to the Presbytery" - the suggestion being that clergymen had a right to rule the church without ruling elders. Hodge argued that elders have a right to come to the Presbyterian courts, but although their attendance was important their presence was not essential to the constitution of these courts. "Ministers are just as much the representatives of the people as elders are." As the only "standing members of Presbytery", three constituent members are all that is necessary to enact government and discipline.

Contd.]

pp. 176f. Thornwell applauded Breckinridge's views and from 1843 onward wrote numerous articles expanding the same theory of elder-ship and charge of clericalism. See the collection of these articles under the section "Church Officers", Writings of ...Thornwell, Vol. IV, pp. 15-142.

¹The minutes of this and the foregoing actions of the Old School General Assembly are cited in Samuel J. Baird, ed., A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 2nd Ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), pp. 70-80.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 439f; "Rights of Ruling Elders", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 315f.

If the elders are there, they are members only as delegated for a particular meeting.¹ Hodge never considered this as inconsistent with his first ecclesiastical principle, because it merely said that the people have a right to a substantial part in the government of the church. This evidently meant that people's rights need not be exercised or be absolutely essential to church government. Besides, it was just a way the people could join with the clergy in the duties of government and discipline. This seems to be the case, for Hodge saw nothing wrong with courts setting up commissions, composed entirely of clergy with delegated powers, to carry out other functions of the church.² He was also not opposed to church boards being operated by clergy without elders. He found support for this line of reasoning in the 1842 General Assembly's resolution confirming that a candidate could be properly ordained sine titulo. Actually the Assembly was only giving support to its practice of ordaining evangelists for foreign and frontier missions, but Hodge saw this as a verification that the main business of the minister need not be preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments to a church, but could be "the more humble office of teaching her candidates the a b c of the sacred language, of superintending their general or professional education."³ This was of course the rationalization

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 447, 439. Note that Hodge also denied that ministers could represent the people. Hodge, "The Elder Question", p. 265.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1847), p. 409; "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1855), pp. 506f.

³Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1842), pp. 477f. Cf. Baird, Collection, p. 113.

for his own ordination,¹ but it appears that he used this to sanction other positions held by the non-pastoral clergy. It was inevitable that there would be an unproportioned amount of clergy in those presbyteries which had colleges, seminaries and the headquarters for the church boards. Noting this tendency and its influence upon the actions of the courts, a minority group of the 1844 General Assembly protested against this.

According to this decision, the government of the Church may be exercised by even three Ministers who have been ordained sine titulo, and who have never been called to rule even an individual Church; and we certainly believe that our Book never can sanction a decision which might even occasionally devolve the whole authority of a Presbytery upon those who have never in any way been elected by the people to govern them.²

The rise of this new ecclesiasticism dominated by clergy frightened men like Thornwell, Dabney and Breckinridge, even though these men in time were themselves professors in seminaries. They could see that the only remedy would be to assure the ruling elder and the minister of the same authoritative relation to the Church. That is, both should have the same divine warrant for their office which would be equal in authority in the courts, although different in functions. If elders were duly appointed and ordained in the same manner as clergy, then their presence would be required to constitute a proper church court. Hodge fought this because to say they had equal divine warrant would mean that elder and clergy had

¹It should be remembered from our "Introduction" that Hodge was never a pastor of a church, but spent his entire ministry as a professor at P.T.S.

²Baird, Collection, p. 72.

the same office, and this would mean that they would have the same functions. The result was that the laymen would be without representation in the government of the church, because elders would become ministers. This would also destroy the parity of the clergy, because the clergy would be over the "elder-ministers", since the clergy are said to be first in dignity and usefulness.¹ The only conclusion for Hodge seemed to be that the clergy appear for the ministers and could appear for the people in the governing courts of the Church, and that the elders, when they appear, appear as laymen representing the power of all individual Christians in particular congregations. Again Hodge did not see the inconsistency of this with his first principle of church polity.

To draw together Hodge's argument for the people having a right to a substantial part in the government of the church, it can be said that by Christ's authority, the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell in and give power to the whole church, including both classes of Christians - the people and the clergy. Thus power which is the basis for the right is inherent to all professing Christians and is expressed by the principle of liberty. However the people's power at the same time is ordered by the Bible as the ultimate authority in faith and practice. Also by physical, but divine necessity, the exercise of their power is restricted to elders, who may appear in church courts along with the clergy, and who may thus represent the power and right of the people to govern and discipline their church society. Hodge contended that to determine the functions of

¹Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), pp. 559f.

these elders is, therefore, to determine the powers of the people.¹

Hodge stated three negations of the representative's power. First, he set apart the power of teaching by preaching and administering the sacraments and the power of ordaining or commissioning as exclusive powers or duties of ministers, thus proving "that they are not to be exercised by the people themselves" - that is, their ruling elders.² Hodge reserved his explanation of these powers for the second principle of polity - the office and parity of the clergy.³ The second negation of the elder's power is that it was subject to the control of church courts. The description of these courts, their interrelationship, their nature and sphere of power were all assigned to his third principle of polity - the unity of the church.⁴

The power of the representatives is not necessarily co-extensive with that of his constituents; while he cannot do what they have no authority to do, it does not follow that he can do all that they may be entitled to perform. His power depends upon the extent of his commission. His authority may be limited, as in the case of Congress and of our General Assembly, by a written constitution, or it may be limited by a higher authority; as in the case of the Church rulers, by the word of God. Hence, it no more follows that ruling elders, as representatives of the people, can exercise all the functions which inhere primarily in the people, than that Congress may do all that the people are assumed to have a right to do. Because as the power of Congress is limited by the constitution of the country, so the power of ruling elders is limited by the constitution of the Church, and by the word of God.⁵

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", pp. 402-403.

²Hodge, "The Elder Question", p. 266.

³See our Chapter 5.

⁴See our Chapter 6.

⁵Hodge, "The Elder Question", p. 265.

It should be noted that Hodge does not specifically say what power the people have which is not exercised through their representative elders. We can only surmise this to be the powers and duties of private judgment and of individual piety. He once preached on the duties of a church society and then added that it is not

to be inferred that all the activities of Christians are to be confined to strictly church organizations. They are not only members of the church but also members of society. They are therefore bound to promote its intellectual improvement in sustaining schools and other educational institutions, its moral improvement must (be sought) in all appropriate ways, and the relieve (relief) of its poor and suffering.¹

What we need to see now are the categories of power in which the people may participate through their representative-elders in the government of a church. It should be remembered that these powers are executed as if the individual himself is exercising them, because "a representative is one who acts for another, who does for him what he has a right to do in his own name. It is evident that the representative cannot do what his constituents are not authorized to do."² This is why Hodge made continued use of his favorite analogy of the form of American government to explain the right of church government by the people. "Congress has the right to make laws, because the people, in this country, whom they represent, have all the attributes of sovereignty."³ After noting that the apostolic

¹Hodge, "Church of God", "Sermons", MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S. On examination of Hodge's sermons, one finds an overwhelming amount of exhortations, when not appealing to rational acceptance of saving doctrines, directed at the individual's exercise of piety. Hodge, "Sermons" H6624fi, H6624sf, H6624u, H6624un, Al.Alc; PS.

²Hodge, "The Elder Question", p. 265.

³Ibid.

epistles are addressed to the saints of the early churches as well as to the clergy, Hodge wrote,

The fact that these commands are addressed to the people, or to the whole Church, proves that they were responsible, and that they had a substantive part in the government of the Church. It would be absurd in other nations to address any complaints or exhortations to the people of Russia in reference to national affairs, because they have no part in the government. It would be no less absurd to address Roman Catholics as a self-governing body. But such addresses may well be made by the people of one of our States to the people of another, because the people have the power, though it is exercised through legitimate organs. While, therefore, the epistles of the apostles do not prove that the churches whom they addressed had not regular officers through whom the power of the Church was to be exercised, they abundantly prove that such power vested in the people; that they had a right and were bound to take part in the government of the Church and in the preservation of its purity.¹

In short, the representative system of elders used by Hodge seems to be a blending of the Reformed tradition with American constitutional democracy. On the one hand, he believed that ultimately the elders were appointed by God to act for the people, to rule the church in His name and by His power and to be answerable only to Him. On the other hand, he considered the elders as being elected by the people to represent them in courts and that the elder exercised those powers God had granted to the people in sensu primo, but which they had delegated to him. Thus the American elder, although not answerable to the people, was actually exercising those powers which the people theoretically had the right to exercise.

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 407.

Power of Order

The first power and prerogative of the people is the "power of order".¹ With this power, the people 1) can form themselves into self-governing church societies, distinct from the state and, 2) with an administrative government of their own, can make rules (a) for ordering of public worship and (b) for sustaining and extending their society and God's truth, which gives them the right to draw up constitutions, confessions and a book of discipline, and to select ministers as well as elders.²

Church Government Distinct From the State

We have already observed Hodge's use of the first aspect of this power in his concept of the formation of church societies.³ Here he reinforces this by also saying that the power of order or of making ecclesiastical rules lies exclusively with the people of the church or their officers and on no occasion should be in the hands of the state or civil magistrates. He admitted that this separation of church power and state power was a "novel, yet sound

¹It will become evident as we proceed why it is more consistent with Hodge's whole line of thought to follow his arrangement of church powers - i.e. "of order", "of keys", "of doctrine and teaching", and "of serving tables" - as found in his sermon, "Church of God", "Sermons", MS A1.Alc., and in his lecture outline, "Draft...on the Church", MS H6624d, than to observe the listing of these powers - i.e. "doctrine, worship, order and discipline" - which he used in his address, "What Is Presbyterianism?". It should be noted that these church powers are not exclusively the people's, but that Hodge assigned these also to the clergy.

²Some of 2)(b) is treated by Hodge more fully under the actual exercise of the other powers. See our pp. 234f, 253f, 296f.

³Cf. our pp. 130f.

doctrine...";¹ "novel" because in the history of the church no such relationship with the state had been practiced until the early days of America; and "sound" because it was founded on the proper conclusions derived from the Word of God as to the nature of the state and the nature of the church.

Hodge contended that the state was a divine institution because "the powers that be are ordained of God." Regardless of its form, be it "monarchical, aristocratical or democratical", "despotic or free",² the state should be placed "in the same category with the family and the church", and be regarded as having "religious sanctions" and "pervaded by a divine presence and authority, which immeasurably strengthens, while it elevates its power."³

God, Hodge declared,

has impressed certain laws on all his creatures, and thereby revealed his will that they should act in accordance with them. And in giving men a social nature and having impressed on them the law of social organization he has made himself the author and basis of all civil authority and rule. The providential government of God, which supposes all things to be under his control, so that the existence of any particular form of government, is to be regarded as his act and is to be revered and submitted to, in its appropriate sphere, so long as he permits it to exist.⁴

Thus magistrates derive their authority from God; they act as His ordained civil ministers, representing Him in the secular world.⁵

¹Hodge, "Relation of the Church and the State", BRPR (October, 1863), p. 692.

²Hodge, R₂, pp. 306f, 313.

³Hodge, "Civil Government", BRPR (January, 1851), pp. 140f.

⁴Hodge, "Sermon: Romans 13:1", MS H6624s at P.T.S.

⁵Hodge, ST, III, p. 357.

Hodge believed that obedience to the state, the magistrates and the civil laws, is a moral obligation and a part of our obedience to God, as long as its laws and actions are consistent with God's natural law. Civil government "is instituted for the protection of life, and property, for the preservation of order, for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of those who do well."¹ It, therefore, has and uses secular power over life, property or the external acts of men, while acting as a part of God's providential moral government. However, Hodge argued,

the proper sphere of civil government is the civil and social relations of men and their temporal welfare; conscience, and of course religion, are beyond its jurisdiction, except so far as the interests of civil society are necessarily connected with them. What extent of ground this exception covers ever² has been, and probably will ever remain, a matter of dispute.

What was not in dispute, according to Hodge, was the nature of the church society with its exclusive power of order or self-government. God ordained the church society as a divine institution, with unique spiritual powers to make and execute ecclesiastical laws and to select its own officers, both without the interference of the state. The church, not the state, has the design and sphere of promoting and extending true religion.³

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 559. By protection of order, Hodge meant that the State's "great duty is self-preservation; that is, to preserve society from destructive evils." Hodge, How is the Sabbath to be Sanctified? (Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, n.d.), p. 11. See our pp. 276f for how Hodge used this to support his concept that the state must act according to God's moral law.

²See our pp. 273f, 276-296 for the issues of disputes in American society, and also a more extensive treatment of Hodge's view of the nature of the State.

³Hodge, "Relation of the Church and the State", BRPR (October, 1863), p. 693.

When tracing the history of church-state relations, Hodge dismissed every theory ever practiced other than the American one as unbiblical because these theories were reasoned a priori from the design or mission of these institutions instead of being determined by word of God, which, as noted above, reveals their nature as independent, divine institutions in separate spheres.¹ Hodge criticized Constantine's plan of having the civil ruler as the bishop of the external affairs of the church and the ecclesiastical rulers as the bishops of the internal affairs of the church as being "too indefinite to keep two mighty bodies from coming into collision."² Hodge then took this formula as practiced by the major church societies in history and showed how, in various degrees, either the state society ordered and controlled the church society or vice versa,

¹It is questionable whether the American Constitutional fathers or those religious and civic minded colonialists founded the theory of church-state separation exclusively on these Biblical arguments of Hodge. The pluralism of colonial churches (each of whom had to or wanted to grant freedom to other churches in order to enjoy freedom for itself) and the domination of the political circles by rationalistic deists (who wanted to be unmolested by religion and ecclesiastical customs) made the national policy of church-state separation adopted in 1789 mainly a matter of practical and political necessity. Only after this constitutional policy had been in practice for a few years did those churches with roots in the established churches of the Old World seriously seek to justify Biblically the "voluntary" existence of American "denominationalism". Sidney E. Mead, The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963), pp. 38-71. One writer admits that most of the founding fathers of the American Constitution were not "out-and-out a priorist". However, he argues that they employed a utilitarian (in opposition to transcendental) interpretation of the natural law to draw up the national government. This natural law had only a nominal reference to the Bible. Cornelia Geer Le Boutillier, American Democracy and Natural Law (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), pp. 109-153.

²Hodge, "Relation of the Church and the State", BRPR (October, 1863), p. 680.

each with the design of protecting and promoting the true religion. He contended that the former evil was seen in Anglican England and in the Lutheran and Reformed countries of Europe, and that the latter evil could be seen in every predominant Roman Catholic country in the world. Both of these theories were erroneous in their use of the Old Testament, as were the early Puritans of New England who merged the institutions of church and state together advocating a theocracy and the persecution of heretics.

"When reasoning from the word of God (as to church-state relations), we are not authorized to argue from the Old Testament economy, because that was avowedly temporary, and has been abolished; but must derive our conclusions from the New Testament."¹ Hodge admitted that in the Old Testament, "God made a nation his Church and his Church a nation," with membership and obedience related the same to both the Church and the State.² The theocracy directed all the Hebrews' "municipal and national, as well as their social and religious affairs. It, therefore, could not coexist in time and place with any other national organization."³ This was "God's way of preserving the knowledge of the true religion in that age of the world."⁴ But when Christ came, He changed the organization, officers and modes of worship of the church, so that it became a body separate from the state with the right to administer its own government and

¹Ibid., p. 692.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 558.

³Hodge, ST, II, p. 605.

⁴Hodge, ST, III, p. 558.

discipline.

As it was intended by Christ that his Church should be thus catholic or universal, existing under all forms of human government, civilized or savage, it was clearly his intention that it should be thus independent and distinct from the State. He declared that his kingdom was not of this world. It is not of the same kind with worldly kingdoms; it has different ends to accomplish, and different means for the attainment of those ends. It is spiritual, that is, concerned with the religious or spiritual, as distinguished from the secular interests of men. It moves, therefore, in a different sphere from the State, and the two need never come into collision.¹

Hodge argued that the Roman Church's collision with the State came from their affinity with the Old Testament theocracy making the church "essentially an externally organized body" so that all born within its pale are ipso facto its members, and all not born within must join their visible institution in order to receive their sacraments which are their exclusive channels of the benefits of redemption. Thus there can be no other church in a state than the Roman Church with its infallible papal head.

Although not identified with the State, the (Roman) Church theoretically absorbs the State, and does so in fact wherever it has the ascendancy. The Church is a body which has two arms - a spiritual and a secular. It demands that the State require all its subjects to profess its faith, to receive its sacraments, and to submit to its discipline; and where it has not the power thus to render the State its tool, it openly asserts its right to do so.²

Hodge noted that in the past the Roman Church had claimed "the right to interfere in all the decisions of the civil power", because she considered that "she only could judge whether these decisions were or were not inimical to the true faith, or consistent with the rule

¹Ibid., p. 559.

²Ibid., pp. 560f, 543f.

of duty." Hence arose Rome's indirect power in the temporal affairs of the State which Hodge condemned as alien to the true nature of the church society and its spiritual power of order. He pointed out that this also led to states claiming an indirect power in the affairs of the church so as to resist the intolerable domination of the Roman Church.¹

Hodge was no less critical of the Protestant theories which allowed the state to interfere with a church's power of order. He argued that the common doctrine among the Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe rested on the false assumption that the state, as a divine institution and as represented by divinely appointed magistrates, was designed by God to promote the general welfare of society, and as religion is necessary to that welfare, religion falls legitimately within the sphere of the state. This would allow the state with its secular power of pains and penalties to regulate and enforce the affairs of the church. Hodge argued that in the case of Erastian England this power could be exercised by the state without judgment of the clergy or consent of the people. But even if these churches considered the magistrate's office limited by the prescriptions of the New Testament's form of religion,

¹Hodge, "Relations of the Church and the State", BRPR (October, 1863), p. 681. In writing his Systematic Theology, Hodge seemed most aware of both the dogma of papal infallibility as promulgated by the Vatican Council in 1870 and the encyclical, Quanta cura, along with a Syllabus of Errors issued by Pope Pius IX in 1864. These he considered as open condemnations not only of the legitimate authority belonging to the state, but of the principles of American democracy. Hodge, ST, I, pp. 149f; III, p. 561.

they nevertheless were acting on the Old Testament principles, which included among the duties of the pious kings, "the support and reformation of religion, and the punishment of idolaters."¹

For Hodge, there were three mistakes in this doctrine. 1. It rested "on the transfer of law founded on the temporary relations of the Hebrews, to the altered relations of Christians." That is, Christians can be related in a church society without being associated as citizens of the same state or even members of a state. Therefore the state can not possess and exercise ecclesiastical power of order belonging to Christians that are not its citizens.² 2. The New Testament is silent about any such doctrine; instead it assigns them to the church and church officers as a distinct body. 3. The secular power and means which the state employs "are inconsistent with the example and commands of Christ; with the rights of private Christians, guaranteed in the word of God, (i.e., to serve God according to the dictates of his conscience,) are ineffectual to the true end of religion, which is voluntary obedience to the truth, and production of incalculable evil."³

In his "Lecture Addressed to the Students of the (Princeton) Theological Seminary", made shortly after returning from a two-year study in Europe, Hodge reported on some of the evils that he thought were produced by the Protestant church-state unions - chief of which

¹Hodge, "Relation of the Church and the State", BRPR (October, 1863), pp. 684-691.

²Hodge, "The Law of God" (n.d.), "Lecture Notes 1824-1849", MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S.

³Hodge, "Relation of the Church and the State", BRPR (October, 1863), p. 693.

was that the church "becomes a mere branch of a secular system."

The church being put into the hands, and under the direction of statesmen, is of course, used for attaining the object which the state, as such, has in view, viz. the temporal well-being of society. They require in its officers, no other qualifications than such as this object demands; they take cognizance of no offences but such as obviously militate against it. When the church is thus secularized, that the clergy should become worldly, would seem inevitable. Besides this, civil rulers, were they ever so well qualified to exercise the governing power in the church, in many cases, cannot do it without injustice, for in their hands ecclesiastical discipline becomes a secular punishment. To depose a man from the ministry, is often virtually to banish him from his country; to prevent a profligate parent from presenting his child for baptism, is to deprive that child of most of the rights of citizenship. It is next to impossible to preserve either purity of faith or practice, under such circumstances. When the church has once fallen in errors however serious, how is the evil to be remedied? Should a number of scattered ministers become orthodox and pious, what can they do? They can preach and write, but having no authority, they cannot stop the tide of irreligious men constantly flowing into the sacred office. They are completely fettered, and weep in silence over the desolations which they cannot restore. A free community is a living community, it can throw off its own impurities, and if it fall can rise again.¹

Hodge told his students that they should "rejoice in the free institutions with which God has blessed our happy country." In

¹Hodge, "Introductory Lecture", BRPR (1829), pp. 77-79. Comparing this with the comments in the "Journal" he kept while in Europe, it would appear Hodge was thinking mainly of Lutheran Prussia. LCH pp. 176f, 193f. But he also attributed this evil to England, Switzerland and Scotland, although he believed that the Church of Scotland was in a great measure independent of the state. He contended that Calvin, Beza, Turretin and the original Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism had been wrong in their teaching about union of church and state and the power of the civil magistrates in matters of religion. But he applauded the American Church and the Free Church of Scotland for their acting on the correct interpretation of the New Testament doctrine. Hodge, "Relation of the Church and the State", BRPR (October, 1863), pp. 688-690; "Dr. Schaff's Apostolic Church", BRPR (January, 1854), p. 162; "Claims of the Free Church of Scotland", BRPR (April, 1844), pp. 245f; "The Law of God", "Lecture Notes 1824-1849", MS A1.Alc. at P.T.S.

reference to the church, American Protestants believe,

The kingdom of Christ is not of this world, but it constitutes in the world, a self-existent and independent society, and as such has all the rights of self-government. Among these essential rights, which the church can never resign and which can never be lawfully taken from her; are the rights of deciding upon the terms of membership, selecting and ordaining her own officers, regulating her internal concerns, the exercise of discipline, and in short, all those rights which are inherent in a voluntary¹ association recognized by the laws (of the United States).

Hodge admitted that the dissenting churches in other countries had this belief - that their church should have power of order or self-government distinct from the state. He asserted that it was always in these churches that true faith and piety could be found.² The other advantage of the people freely exercising their power of order and not passively obeying either the state or the ecclesiastical hierarchy is that it increases the mental activity of the people.

If the people possess the gifts and graces which qualify and entitle them to take part in the government, then the exercise of that right tends to the development of those gifts and graces, and the denial of the right tends to their depression. In all forms of despotism, whether civil or ecclesiastical, the people are degraded; and in all forms of scriptural liberty they are proportionably elevated. Every system which demands intelligence tends to produce it. Every man feels that it is not only one of the greatest advantages of our republican institutions that they tend to the education and elevation of the people, but that their successful operation, demanding popular intelligence and virtue, renders it necessary that constant exertion should be directed to the attainment of that end. As republican institutions cannot exist among the ignorant and vicious, so Presbyterianism must find the people enlightened and virtuous, or make them so.³

¹Hodge, "Introductory Lecture", BRPR (1829), p. 77.

²Ibid., p. 79.

³Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 419. Cf. Hodge, "Introductory Lecture", BRPR (1829), pp. 76-77.

But even though Hodge was insistent that a church and the state were separate and exclusive, he did not mean that they had no mutual obligations to each other. He did believe that the laws and actions of one had no jurisdiction in the sphere of the other. That is, the state must protect civil rights of all persons and a church is designed to seek the spiritual salvation of all men by teaching the truth of the Bible. But both are under the providence of God - the state using natural or moral law by civil means and a church using moral law and Biblical revelation by spiritual means. This means that churches as well as individuals should abide by the laws of the state and only disobey those laws when private conscience judges them to be adverse to the moral law of God. Also, the state, taking its form and character from the will of the majority of its people, should administer its government accordingly. In the case of the United States, "the people of this country have the right, and are in conscience bound to act on the principle of Protestant Christianity, not only in their capacity as individuals, but as a government, in all cases in which Christianity affords a rule for individual or governmental action."¹ As to which "cases" Hodge meant, we will consider later, but for the present, he has dismissed state action or participation in the government of any church society, which comes exclusively under the power of order administered by a church or its officers.

¹Hodge, "Sunday Laws", BRPR (October, 1859), p. 760. Cf. Hodge, ST, III, pp. 340-347, 353-360; R₂, pp. 304f; R₃, pp. 650f; "The Education Question", BRPR (July, 1854), pp. 504-541; "Civil Government", BRPR (January, 1851), pp. 133-154; "The State of the Country", PR (January, 1861), pp. 1f; "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), pp. 614f; "Sermon: Romans 13:1", MS H6624s at Speer Library of P.T.S. See our pp. 273f.

Ordering of Public Worship

Use of Liturgy

The first aspect of this power treated by Hodge was the ordering of public worship. A Directory of Worship had been included in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States from the day of its adoption in 1789, but most churches had neglected to follow even these general rules or worship very closely. Hodge recognized that Presbyterianism, jealous of its principle of liberty, disliked to be "trammelled" by liturgical forms.

The consciousness of the essential equality of all in whom the Spirit of God dwells, and the conviction that those whom Christ calls to the ministry, he qualified for the discharge of its duties, naturally produces a revolt against the prescription by authority of the very words in which the public worship of God is to be conducted. Those who can walk are impatient of leading strings. It cannot be doubted that the theory of Presbyterianism is opposed to the use of liturgies. In the ideal state of the Church - in that state which our theory contemplates, where every minister is really called of God, and is the organ of the Holy Ghost in the exercise of his functions, liturgies would be fetters, which nothing but compulsion could induce any man to wear.¹

This is why the Presbyterians of both Great Britain and America have in the past resisted the "tyranny" of the Church of England when she has tried to impose "an obnoxious prayer-book."² Besides, Hodge pointed out, most Presbyterians do not use liturgies because any and all prescribed forms of worship can be insufficient to suit all the diverse inward and outward religious states of either the congregation or the minister. The use of liturgies cannot be as adequate a

¹Hodge, "Presbyterian Liturgies", BRPR (July, 1855), p. 456.

²Ibid., pp. 459-460. Hodge is referring primarily to the third "Book of Common Prayer" of 1559.

substitute for the warm outgoings of the heart moved by the Spirit of genuine devotion.

However Hodge wrote,

The extreme of insisting that certain forms should alone be used, begat the extreme of insisting that no forms should be allowed. It is obvious however to the candid, that between these extremes there is a wide and safe middle ground. That safe middle ground is the optional use of a liturgy, or form of public service, having the sanction of the church.¹

The sanction of the Presbyterian Church should be given to a book of liturgies if this book met two conditions. First, the book should be compiled from the liturgies and prayers of the Bible, of Calvin, of Knox and of the Reformed Churches. Only those prayers once uttered by the Holy Spirit through the lips of saints which have been purified by time and have received the sanction of those in whom the Spirit dwells should be used. When Hodge stated why the liturgy should not be written, he momentarily dropped the stigma attached to his ecclesiology. "A prayer to suit the Church must be the product of the Church. It must be free in thought, language and feeling from everything which belongs to the individual. It must be the product, in other words, of the Holy Spirit."² The second condition for sanctioning a book of public worship is that it should be optional.

Hodge listed three advantages of the church using its power to compile an optional common book of worship. "In the first place, it would be a great assistance to those who are not specially

¹Ibid., p. 460.

²Ibid.

favoured with the gift of prayer, and thus tend to elevate and improve this important part of public worship."¹ Second, it would correct some of the evil or irrelevant tendencies and doctrines that blemish the public worship and the celebration of other religious services. And last, it would provide for vacant churches, settlers, soldiers, sailors, or other Christians, gathered without a minister, an authoritative form of worship. In short, Hodge's argument was that such a book of rules of worship would insure that all public prayers and the forms for the administration of the sacraments, for marriage and for funerals could be performed in adherence to the simple but orthodox mode of Presbyterian worship. But Hodge contended that the people of the church must retain their power of order as to the jus liturgicum. "The ministry cannot frame a ritual, or liturgy, or directory for public worship, and enjoin its use on the people to whom they preach. All such regulations are of force only so far as the people themselves, in conjunction with their ministers, see fit to sanction and adopt them."²

It might be observed that while Hodge saw the value of liturgical worship as retaining the purity of doctrines taught and believed by a church, he also had the utmost regard for the unhindered experiences of piety available to the worshipper. His emphasis seemed to be on the subjective state of the worshipper and that the acts of worship should always enhance the Christian's religious life. This appears more obvious in his discussion of

¹Ibid., p. 461.

²Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 404.

two of the main elements of worship: prayer, and attendance of the sacraments.¹

Public Worship Through Prayer and the Sacraments as Means
of Grace

Hodge held both prayer and the sacraments along with the Bible to be divinely ordained means of grace or two of the ordinary channels whereby the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit and the corresponding spiritual gifts come to Christians.² Prayer, both private and public, is addressed only to God, but the person who prays must meet certain "requisites" if his prayer is to be acceptable and to become a "means". The order in which Hodge places these requisites is: sincerity, reverence, humility, importunity, submission, faith and offered in the name of Christ. Hodge wrote, "With regard to the multitudes who, in places of public worship, repeat the solemn forms of devotion or profess to unite with those who utter them (prayers), without any corresponding emotions, the service is little more than mockery."³ In public prayer, the minister is the organ of the people, therefore it "is of great importance to their spiritual edification and comfort that there should be nothing (in his prayers)

¹It should be understood that Hodge considered public services to have two aspects: worship and instruction. In the former he included singing, about which he says nothing more. The latter included reading of the Bible and preaching. Adhering to what had become the practice of American Protestant Churches, Hodge believed that the sermon should have the prominent place within the public services, because it was the primary means of the instructions of truths, knowledge being "the essential element of religion." Hodge, ST, III, p. 707. Cf. Our pp. 305f.

²Ibid., pp. 466, 708.

³Ibid., pp. 701-705.

with which they cannot sympathize, or which offends or disturbs their feelings."¹ Thus Hodge also set out the suitable conditions for the officiating minister that would best awaken the spiritual feelings and desires of the people, foremost of which were a "truly devout spirit" and the "appropriate use of Scriptural language". In public, as well as private prayer, "the soul must be holy and must be blessed", for "when the soul thus draws near to God, God draws near to it." To Hodge, then, any proper prayer is one of the means of grace that God ordained and the church uses to exercise the sanctified influences of the Holy Spirit.²

Because of the significance that the sacraments have on the whole of any theologian's ecclesiology, it might be thought strange to expound Hodge's doctrine of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the context of the people's power to order public worship. But such is necessary in light of the fact that Hodge considered them primarily as a "means and a mode of divine worship" which a church society ought to observe, even though their celebration is not essential to the church's existence.³

When Hodge first wrote at length on the sacraments in his 1841 publication of The Way of Life, he introduced them in the context of their necessity; that is, it was the universally conceded duty of every Christian to confess Christ publicly in this particular way.

¹Hodge, "Presbyterian Liturgies", BRPR (July, 1855), p. 463.

²Hodge, ST, III, pp. 707-708.

³Hodge, "Is the Church of Rome a part of the Visible Church?", BRPR (April, 1846), p. 333. Also see our pp. 191-194 for how Hodge admitted that valid administration of the sacraments by laymen was possible.

He believed, "To confess Christ is to recognize his character and claims. It is to acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ. It is to admit the truth of the doctrines which he taught. It is to profess our allegiance to him as our Lord and Saviour."¹ Because Christ appointed these two ordinances as specific modes of confessing him, "intelligently and wilfully to refuse obedience to his command, is to renounce our allegiance to him, and to forfeit the benefits of his kingdom", and to reject the covenant of grace.² Although this made attending the sacraments "the strongest moral obligation" and an "indispensable duty", there was a "qualified necessity" involved, first, because Christ's command is "not binding under all circumstances", and, second, because the sacraments are not a "necessity of means" in that salvation and spiritual benefits may be secured without them.³ However, Hodge contended that the sincere Christian would automatically and perpetually want to observe the sacraments due to their very nature and design.

Hodge said that little could be learned of the nature of the sacraments from the term itself because it was not a scriptural word and was used too comprehensively by the early church to include any sacred mystery. Instead, the nature must be derived from the conditions which characterize baptism and the Lord's Supper and which make them the only two "rites of Divine appointment."⁴ Hodge

¹Hodge, WL, pp. 176-179.

²Ibid., pp. 193f.

³Ibid.; Hodge, ST, III, p. 516.

⁴Hodge, WL, pp. 179-180; ST, III, pp. 485f, 492f.

considered them to be visual symbols of the "great truths" taught in the Bible about pardon and sanctification resulting from a Christian's union with Christ through faith. These ordinances are also "seals" or "visible pledges", "to certify to believers their interest in the blessings of the covenant of grace."¹ They are like the "rainbow" in that they act as God's "perpetual confirmation of his covenant", thus assuring the believers "that Christ has died, that his death has been accepted as a propitiation for sin, and that God, for his sake, will grant pardon, sanctification, and eternal life to all them that believe."² They act as seals on the part of the worshipper, because his "reception of them implies a voluntary engagement ... to devote himself to the service of Christ."³ Because of this latter aspect of the seal, Hodge called the Lord's Supper "the sum of Christian piety." Continuing in this sermon, he said,

The Lord's Supper is not a didactic service. Its primary design is not to instruct. It is like the ancient sacrifices in this respect. Instruction is involved in it, but in the act of offering the state of mind required is that of a worshipper. He comes to do, and not to learn. But it is a liturgical service; not a service for the people, but by the people.⁴

Here Hodge intended a denunciation of any attempt (i.e., Roman Catholic) to keep the people passive while the minister administers the sacrament, but it is clear that he also expects the worshipper

¹Hodge, WL, p. 180.

²Ibid., pp. 182-183; Hodge, ST, III, pp. 588-589.

³Hodge, WL, p. 183.

⁴Hodge, "Retrospect of the Lord's Supper", PS, pp. 337-338.

to perform a certain act of dedication in order to fulfill the stipulated conditions of the covenant of grace to which he is a partner. "Therefore, to baptism (and the Lord's Supper) may be properly attributed all that in the Scriptures is attributed to faith." It also followed that if the celebration of the sacraments was "an act of faith", then they were means of grace and could communicate what they signify and pledge.¹

Hence arises value and efficacy.

When the Christian, in the exercise of faith, sees in the water of baptism the lively emblem of the purifying influence of the blood and Spirit of Christ, and in the bread and wine the memorials of the Saviour's death, and knows that they are appointed to be a pledge of the salvation of all believers, he receives Christ, in receiving the appointed symbols of his grace; he receives anew the forgiveness of his sins; he enters into fellowship with God, and his soul is filled with the Holy Ghost. Hence it is that believers so often find their strength renewed, their faith confirmed, their purposes invigorated, their hearts filled with joy and love, while attending on these ordinances.²

This, Hodge contended, made the sacraments more than a moral influence, or more than "the objective presentation of the truth which they signify", which he accused Zwingli of making them.³ However, when Hodge described what and how the sacraments convey, he seemed to limit their value and efficacy to divinely appointed rites which exhibit Christian doctrine and through which the Holy Spirit may excite merely additional religious dedication.

¹Hodge, WL, p. 185; ST, III, p. 589.

²Hodge, WL, p. 185.

³Hodge, ST, III, pp. 498-499, 491-492.

Hodge has said that through the sacraments we receive Christ, the benefits of His redemption and the influence of the Holy Spirit. First, the reception of Christ assumes the presence of Christ, but his attempt to describe the nature of Christ's presence gave Hodge considerable difficulties. We will return to this in our discussion of baptism and the Lord's Supper, but Hodge seemed to believe only in the possible presence of the Spirit.¹ Therefore receiving Christ meant receiving the Holy Spirit's influence and professing Christ's doctrines. Second, when Hodge said we receive the benefits of Christ's redemption, he eliminated regeneration and justification, and proposed that it was solely sanctification conveyed through the celebration of the sacraments.² Reasoning that one has to have sanctifying faith before he can receive sanctification through a sacrament, Hodge admitted that the sacraments were just a "public conveyance" to true believers "who already have the grace which these ordinances represent."³ What he was zealous to denounce was that salvation automatically accompanies the sacraments. He argued that it was "obvious that those passages in Scripture which refer our salvation to baptism and the Lord's Supper cannot, ...be understood strictly according to the letter." According to the Bible's "plain teaching", first, "the fruits of the Spirit - love,

¹Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), pp. 244f; see our pp. 195f, 212f.

²Hodge, "The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace", PS, pp. 331f; ST, III, pp. 591f, 647f; see our pp. 192f, 218f.

³Hodge, E, pp. 323-324; WL, pp. 186f.

gentleness, goodness, and faith" should be present, but we can see that they are not uniformly present among those who attend the sacraments. Second, the sacrament "has no efficacy in itself considered; its value depends on the presence or performance of the condition of the covenant to which it is attached". This condition is faith which presupposes regeneration. Third, there are people who were saved and had pious fruits who had not received the sacramental rite.¹ This proved for Hodge that the Roman Catholics were wrong in making the sacraments exclusive channels of grace. Nevertheless both baptism and the Lord's Supper, as appointed means of professing faith and obedience, can induce more sanctification if the worshipper already has a renewed heart, has been justified, and has a sincere faith. This faith, as expressed in celebrating the sacraments, wrote Hodge, "is not the mere assent of the mind to the truth of certain propositions. It is a cordial persuasion of the truth, founded on the experience of its power or the spiritual preception of its nature, and on the divine testimony. Faith is, therefore, a moral exercise."²

But having this belief coming from the renewed heart was contingent on receiving the influence of the Holy Spirit. It was solely the Spirit who could make the sacrament efficacious. However, Hodge argued, the Spirit did not always attend the sacraments. This ruled out the ex opere operato doctrine of the Roman Catholics and made void what he called the Lutheran theory that the sacraments

¹Hodge, WL, pp. 186-190.

²Hodge, R₂, p. 253.

were efficacious due "to the inherent, supernatural power of the Word which is an essential part of these divine ordinances."¹ Hodge reasoned that if the Holy Spirit did not always cooperate with the truth as heard, to make it a means of grace, neither did He always convey His sanctifying and saving power at the celebration of the sacraments. For Hodge, this supported three thoughts. First, those not elected to fulfill the covenant of grace's condition of true faith would never receive the Spirit's influences through the sacraments.² Second, the Spirit's sanctifying power or the efficacy of the sacraments is not tied to the time of the celebration of baptism or the Lord's Supper, but, as in infant baptism, "slumber in them as the living principle slumbers in the unsown wheat."³ Third, when the Spirit does convey grace, he does not communicate it uniformly even to the elected saint. Therefore, Hodge maintained in his sermon, "It is not true that every true believer receives Christ, feeds upon him to his spiritual nourishment at the Lord's table, any more than it is true that every such believer is always spiritually edified by prayer or the reading of the Scriptures."⁴ Again, Hodge insisted, "The Spirit, it is to be ever remembered, is a personal agent who works when and how He will."⁵

It is obvious that his polemics on the sacraments were tied

¹Hodge, ST, III, pp. 509f, 502f.

²See our pp. 13f, 34f. Hodge, ST, III, p. 500, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), p. 376.

³Hodge, ST, III, p. 579; "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church", BRPR (April, 1855), p. 356.

⁴Hodge, "The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace", PS, p. 332; WL, p. 186.

⁵Hodge, ST, III, p. 500.

to establishing their value and efficiency as coming from the Holy Spirit and conditioned by faith. The sacraments, admitted Hodge,

have an intrinsic aesthetic, doctrinal, and moral efficacy, but what is denied is, intrinsic efficacy to produce grace. The clay had intrinsic efficacy as clay, but what efficacy had it to open the eyes of the blind? The word of God is quick and powerful - powerful to convince, to terrify, to confound - but what efficacy has it to produce grace, to quicken the spiritually dead, without the working of the Spirit? So the sacraments have intrinsic power, as significant signs, to enlighten the understanding, to rouse the imagination, and to stir the feelings, but what supernatural power have they apart from the influence of the Holy Ghost? The whole question is how they become 'efficacious means of grace.'¹

Thus the unmerited, supernatural, subjective effects received from celebrating the sacraments do not come from the elements, the sacramental actions, nor from the administrator, but solely from the attending power of the Holy Spirit. However, "the condition of this power, on our part, is faith. That is, if we have faith, we experience the power of the sacrament; if we have it not, we do not experience it."²

When Hodge turned to the sacraments, his points mainly reiterated his discussion of their efficacy, but with more emphasis on the conditions in the rite that make it valid. He admitted that the word "valid" could mean "regular or irregular", but he preferred to argue that "a thing is valid when it avails to (is able to effect) its appropriate end."³ On the one hand, he stated that the elements

¹Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 374-375n.

²Hodge, PS, p. 332.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 452-453; ST, III, p. 523.

and the form used in their administration should conform to their Biblical prescription in order to be valid sacraments. But on the other hand, he never expanded how or why these were "essential", except to say this was part of the "common doctrine of the Church." Besides, the most important end of the sacraments is for their celebration to be a public profession of faith, which implies obedience to Biblical commands. This is why the first condition for validity of the sacraments called for the administrator and the recipient to be professors of the Christian religion.¹

However Hodge was more interested in the third essential aspect of the sacraments' validity. Was the sacrament administered and received with valid intentions? "If a man receives the ordinance of baptism, he must intend to profess his faith in the Gospel and to accept the terms of salvation therein presented, and the administrator must have the purpose to initiate the recipient into the number of the professed disciples of Christ." Likewise, both of these engaged in the Lord's Supper should intend "to keep alive the knowledge of the fact" and nature of Christ's death, and to hold that as an "act of worship", the benefits of the covenant of redemption might be appropriated through its celebration. "A sacrament, therefore, administered (or received) by an idiot, or a maniac, or in sport, or in mockery, is utterly null and void. It has no meaning and is entirely worthless."²

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 448f; ST, III, p. 523; WL, pp. 178, 200.

²Hodge, "The Lord's Supper in Relation to Christ's Death", PS, pp. 335-337; ST, III, pp. 524-525; "Presbyterian Liturgies", BRPR (July, 1855), p. 464.

But the validity of the sacraments (in Hodge's preferred sense of validity) does not depend on it being administered by an ordained minister, because this would make the grace conveyed through the sacraments dependent upon the administrator and not solely upon the attendance of the Holy Spirit. Rhetorically Hodge asked,

If a number of pious Christians assembled where no minister can be had, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, in what sense is such a service invalid? Do they not commemorate the death of Christ? Are not the bread and wine to them the symbols of his body and blood? If faith be in-exercise may they not receive those symbols to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace? Again, if baptism be a washing with water in the name of the Holy Trinity, to signify and seal our engrafting into Christ, does it cease to be, or to signify this if not administered by an ordained minister? Does not the man thus baptized make a profession of his faith in Christ? and does he not thereby become a member of that great body which confesses Him before men?¹

However, Hodge also asserted that it would be considered "irregular" and a "violation of the divinely constituted order of Christ's Church" if anyone not properly appointed to the office of the ministry undertook the administration of either sacrament.² He tried to avoid the apparent inconsistency in his position by saying that "if a man is recognized by a Christian community as a minister, he is to be regarded as having due authority" to administer the sacraments.³ We are led to conclude that any professing Christian may administer the sacraments validly, as long as the Christians assembled at the time of worship recognize him as having due authority. "The being of a church (where sacraments may be celebrated) does not

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 525.

²Ibid.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 455, 469.

depend upon the ministry, nor the being of the ministry on the rite of ordination."¹ It will be our task later to see how Hodge also contended that it was normally the ordained minister's unique function to administer the sacraments.

Doctrine of Baptism

It was in protest to the 1845 Old School General Assembly's action of calling invalid a baptism administered within the Roman Catholic Church that Hodge made his first extensive treatment of the doctrine of baptism and its relation to a church. The Assembly had voted 177 to 8 denouncing the validity of Romish baptism because "no rite administered by one who is not himself a duly ordained Minister of the true Church of God visible, can be regarded as an ordinance of Christ, whatever be the name by which it is called, whatever the form employed in its administration."² Hodge counter-acted by saying, "Baptism,...not being an ordinance of any particular Church, but of the church catholic, and every man who professes saving truth being a member of that church, Romish baptism, if administered by a man professing such truth, is Christian baptism."³ He had quoted at the beginning of his argument the Westminster Shorter Catechism definition of baptism: "It is a sacrament, wherein the washing of water, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ, and partaking

¹Ibid.

²Baird, Collection, pp. 103f.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), p. 469.

of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagements to be the Lord's."¹ He then pointed out that according to this definition all Protestants and Romanists agree on the three essentials of a valid baptism: "the washing with water", "in the name of the Trinity", and with the design that recipients may be "formally constituted members of the visible Church, and partakers of its benefits." Hodge said that although it had no bearing on the validity of baptism the Protestants did disagree with the Romans as to "how and to what extent and under what conditions" the design is accomplished.²

That Hodge could separate the intention from what he called the efficacy of baptism bears out his belief that there was no objective reality in baptism. If, however, we remember Hodge's distinction between the true Church and the visible Church and that the latter did not necessarily consist of people actually united to Christ, we can understand why he held the design of baptism to be merely a public recognition of a possible, predetermined, judicial or covenantal relationship and that for the recipient its value was merely a Biblically sanctioned, pious exercise. Christ, wrote Hodge, "obviously intended that baptism should be a badge of discipleship to him."³ On this baptismal relation to Christ, Hodge seemed to hold these views. "Ingrafting into Christ" meant that the recipient takes on himself, for the first time, the obligations

¹Ibid., p. 445.

²Ibid., pp. 449-452.

³Hodge, WL, p. 179.

and privileges of professing Christ. That is, baptism expresses publicly the recipient's cordial reception of Christ's doctrines and thus his formal initiation into the visible Church catholic. This is why a person need be baptized only once. However, Hodge argued, baptism is not absolutely necessary for church members, because "the mere fact of their having faith, and avowing it in their conversation and deportment, makes them members of the visible Church...."¹ By being "baptized into Jesus Christ", Hodge meant that we merely embrace, through our faith, the imputed benefits of Christ's death and resurrection, and not that we are also sacramentally incorporated into His Humanity. Baptism is primarily an act of engagement to or worship of God, whereby the Christian may openly profess that he has fulfilled the conditions, become a partner and received the promises of the covenant of grace.²

Hodge admitted, "We are saved by water; not ordinary water, but by baptism; not mere external baptism, however, but by the sincere turning of the heart to God - that is, by the inward change of which baptism is the outward sign."³ However, it is only the "irreligious, the worldly, the fashionable, and even the vicious" who advocated baptismal regeneration. Hodge contended that the Romanists and the Lutherans equated baptism with inward spiritual renovation and made it necessary for membership in the true and the visible Church. But, as this would imply that all and only the

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 470n, 463.

²Hodge, R₂, pp. 140f; ST, III, pp. 550f, 589-590; WL, pp. 182f, 187f.

³Hodge, WL, p. 188.

baptized are saved, this is a subversion of the plan of salvation and of the proper identity of the invisible Church. Besides, "by facts of experience", we can see that the "baptized as a body remain unchanged in heart and life." "The baptized, therefore, as such, are not the regenerated."¹

Hodge, on the one hand, argued that

faith and repentance, according to the Scriptures, are the fruits of regeneration. He who exercises repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is in a state of salvation before baptism and therefore in a state of regeneration. Regeneration consequently precedes baptism and cannot be its effect, according to the ordinance of God.²

On the other hand, he protested against the Puritan and Baptists' practice of viewing baptism as a recognition of the recipient's prior regeneration, for this would be an attempt to make a visible church society consist exclusively of regenerated members. This theory, pointed out Hodge, "owes its origin to the desire to make the phenomenal agree with the real, the visible with the invisible church", but such "did not enter into the purpose of God."³ In the case of the early Puritans, baptized children who did not later give proof of their regeneration were not allowed to attend the Lord's Supper. This eventually led to the Half-Way Covenant which among other things denied baptism to the third generation and thus "cast out into the world, without watch and care" many who could grow up to be professing Christians. "'To join the Church,' thus came to

¹Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 373-387; ST, III, pp. 591-604; E, p. 324.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 601.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1863), pp. 484-485; ST, III, p. 548.

mean joining the number of those who were admitted to the Lord's Supper. This of course implies, that communicants only are in the Church", because only they had given evidence of regeneration.¹

On the Baptists' position concerning regeneration, baptism and church membership, Hodge reported that they held that

the Church under the new dispensation is a spiritual body, consisting of true believers, therefore none can be members of the Church but those who being regenerated by the Holy Ghost believe in Christ, and none can be properly regarded as members of the Church who do not give satisfactory evidence of regeneration. But as infants, whether capable of regeneration or not, cannot give evidence of being renewed by the Spirit, or profess faith in Christ, they cannot properly be regarded as members of the Church. And as baptism, being the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, is the recognition of Church membership, children are not the proper subjects of baptism.²

Hodge's overall approach to baptism was to disassociate it from either subjective or objective regeneration and to argue about its nature as one of the ways a person may profess the Christian religion for himself or his children, so as to be treated by a church society as among its membership.

The Church society's responsibility to those adults, who apply to be baptized or to become members, is not to judge whether they have been regenerated by the Spirit, "transferred from spiritual death to spiritual life", so as to be true believers and members of the true Church, for "that responsibility is with the candidate" and under the judgment of God.³ The duty of the church is limited to judging a

¹Hodge, ST, III, pp. 544f, 566-572.

²Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 349-350.

³Hodge, "Baptism and Church", "Memoranda and Lecture Notes", 5 Vols. (n.d.) MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S.; "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 350f, 379; WL, pp. 196f; ST, III, pp. 575f.

credible profession of faith and promise of obedience. By "credible", Hodge meant not that which compels belief, but that belief against which no tangible evidence of insincerity can be produced. In his Way of Life, Hodge called these qualifications "knowledge and piety".¹ He goes on to say that unless the truths exhibited in baptism are understood so that the recipient has a proper knowledge of its essential doctrines concerning God, sin, atonement, and regeneration, his baptism is unbeneficial.

All the affections must have an appropriate object. If we love, we love something; if we fear, we fear something; if we desire, we desire something. There can be neither faith, nor love, nor penitence, nor hope, nor gratitude, but as objects suited to these exercises are present to the mind; and the nature of these exercises depends upon the nature of the objects which call them forth. If they are excited by the truth, they are right and good; and just in proportion to the clearness with which the truth is spiritually discerned, will be the purity and strength of the religious emotions. Knowledge, therefore, is essential to religion.²

In addition to learning, this prerequisite knowledge for baptism can be "derived from our own consciousness or inward experience", but "there must be external instruction in order to (enhance) this inward spiritual knowledge."³

On the second qualification of piety, a church must judge whether or not the candidate's manner of life is consistent with the laws of Christ, and has "penitence, gratitude and love which those truths (of baptism), when really believed, necessarily produce." If we meet

¹Hodge, WL, p. 197.

²Ibid., p. 199.

³Ibid., pp. 199-200.

these qualifications in the eyes of a church, but actually make a false profession of faith at our baptism, "our service must be unacceptable to God." However, advised Hodge, the candidate lacking these qualifications is not freed from the obligation of the sacrament. Like any other act of public worship, he must do God's "will and seek his favour" by being baptized.¹

But keeping in mind that a church should seek these Biblical conditions before admitting someone to baptism, how is it that they allow infants to be baptized? For Hodge, it was a matter of election. Infants must be presumed to be elected members of the true Church or partners of the covenant of grace and thus eligible for baptism and membership in a church society. The infant cannot be required to make a profession of faith, because on this, "the language of the Bible is addressed to adults, it is to be restricted in its application to adults." Thus Hodge believed "there are more infants in the true church in heaven and on earth than there are adults, probably an hundred-fold." On the one hand, he attributed this to the Holy Spirit coming "to infants as dew on Hermon", and "in secret parts of the earth" working out their regeneration.² But elsewhere Hodge wrote, "It is not their (the infants') vital union with Christ, nor their actual regeneration by the Holy Ghost, that is presumed (for membership in the true church), but their election." Likewise, "this presumption of election is not founded

¹Ibid., pp. 199-202; ST, III, pp. 575f.

²Hodge, "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church", BRPR (April, 1855), pp. 355-356.

on their baptism, but their baptism is founded on this presumption." That is, infants should be baptized because they are "presumptively within the covenant."¹

However, being a member of the covenant of grace still implies that the condition of faith must be fulfilled. This condition may be met by the infant's parents, because they can profess faith in the name of the child. To prove that the parents are capable of doing this, Hodge began by describing the intimate natural relations he considered to exist between children and parents.

They are not only partakers of the same nature, but the child is of the very substance of the parents, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh. The life of the one is continued in the other. This natural bond is the ground of the instinctive natural affection, which on the part of the parent is one of the strongest elements of our nature. There is moreover the bond of common interest. The destiny of the child is involved in that of the parent. The parent is responsible for the child, and the child is dependent on the parent. It is in virtue of this intimate relationship that, by the will of God, and the very nature of human society, the act of the parent is, in a multitude of cases, the act of the child.²

After he had commented on such cases as a parent choosing a country or food, to which the child must have the same relation and obligation as his parents, Hodge concluded that also "when a man professes the true religion, and enters into covenant with God, his infant children are to be regarded and treated as making the same profession and as included in the same covenant." This principle of

¹Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 376-377.

²Ibid., pp. 352-353.

parent representing the child has always been the law of God and the constitution of our nature, argued Hodge, and as such, "all objections to infant baptism, (or infant church membership,) which assume this principle to be false, are unscriptural."¹ Here Hodge had in mind the Baptists as chief offenders. When they argued that this principle would make the infants of fathers who choose freemasonry, freemasons, Hodge replied,

There is no analogy between this (principle) and a parent joining the army or navy, or entering a masonic lodge, because there is nothing in the nature of a child which makes it necessary for him to belong to some army, or navy, or to be a member of some masonic fraternity. He must, however, be a citizen of some country, and he must have some religion.

Hodge's favorite proof of this representative principle which sanctioned infant baptism and membership in a visible church was the Old Testament Hebrew's use of circumcision as a solemn recognition of his infant's birthright within the covenant established between God and Abraham. He believed that God commanded the circumcision of infants so that they would be treated as foederati like their parents and thus be subject to the promises and conditions of both the national and the spiritual covenants. "Church membership (and baptism) has always been the birthright of the children of believing parents."² It should be remembered that Hodge dismissed this national covenant as temporary and without any signification for the nature of the true Church. However, he was willing to consider the temporal practice of circumcision as verification for the parents'

¹Ibid., pp. 352-359. Cf. Hodge, ST, III, p. 554-555.

²Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 360-373.

natural ability to represent their seed, so as to satisfy the conditions of the remaining covenant of grace, in order for the child's visible church membership and baptism to be recognized.¹

With such an emphasis on filial relationship, Hodge thought it was the proper rule of a church society to baptize only children of those parents who had made a profession of the true religion. He admitted that children whose immediate parents had no connection with a visible church still may be baptized. The promise of the covenant, of which baptism is a sign and seal, belongs "to the thousandth generation" of former members of the covenant. Also orphans, slaves, heathen children or any child "whose parents are unfit or unwilling to bring them up in a Christian manner" may be spiritually adopted by those willing and qualified to assume the responsibility of their religious education so as to become proper subjects of baptism.² Finally, as Hodge believed persons could profess their faith by conversation and deportment and be members of the visible Church catholic, any child whose parents were not actual members of a church society could be baptized.

When the pastor of a local congregation refused to baptize the children of one of Hodge's friendly neighbors because neither parent was a member of his congregation, the family appealed to Hodge to administer the baptism. Hodge's refusal showed his preference for the infant's parents to be professed members of a visible church society. In what seems to be adverse to his position that the

¹Hodge, "Visibility of the Church", BRPR (October, 1853), p. 684; ST, III, pp. 552-555.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 561.

people have the power of order, Hodge said that only the pastor could determine the adequacy of "a profession entitling the parent to have his children baptized." However, the main reason was that the parents, when presenting their children for baptism, assume the obligations of not only professing faith in Christ, but of promising "to live in obedience to all his commands."¹

Hodge readily condemned any parents who thought their children would receive all the promises of the covenant once the child was baptized. "Many of the promises of God are conditional." On the one hand, the parent had to obey the divine precepts in order to dedicate their children to God in baptism and to secure for them the blessings of that covenant.² On the other hand, Christian children are baptized presupposing "that they will be faithful to the covenant and share in its promises."³ Whether or not children would keep the covenant and experience its saving blessings, Hodge believed, depended largely upon the parents' and the child's fidelity after baptism.

God has never promised to make no distinction between faithful and unfaithful parents, between those who bring up their offspring in the nurture of the Lord, and those who utterly neglect their religious training. The condition, which from the nature of the case is implied in this promise, is in many cases expressly stated. His promise is to those who keep his covenant, and to those who remember his commandments to do them. It is involved in the very nature of a covenant that it should have conditions. And although in one important sense, the conditions of the covenant of grace

¹"Dr. Hodge to Mr. B____" (April, 4, 1843), LCH, pp. 398-399.

²Hodge, "Introduction", The Faithful Mother's Reward, pp. vii-xiii.

³Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), p. 377.

have been performed by Christ, still its promises are suspended on conditions to be performed by or in his people. And this is expressly declared to be the case with regard to the promise of the divine blessing to the children of believers. They must keep his covenant. They must train up their children for God. They must use the means which he has appointed for their conversion and sanctification, or the promise does not apply to them. Then again, there is a condition to be performed by the children themselves. God promises to be their God, but they must consent to be his people. He promises them his Spirit, but they must seek and cherish his influence. If they renounce the covenant, and refuse to have God for their God, and to walk in the way of his commandments, then the promise no longer pertains to them.¹

Hodge was deeply convinced that there was "an intimate and divinely established connexion between the faith of parents and the salvation of their children." This connection would lead parents to expect confidently that through God's blessings on their pious efforts their children would grow up as His covenant children. His own experiences as a child, and later as a parent, offered strong indications as to why he believed "that early, assiduous and faithful religious culture of the young, especially by believing parents, is the great means of their salvation."²

When Hodge was Moderator of the Old School General Assembly in 1846, he commended some recent revivals in Presbyterian churches because "they were characterized by quiet, solemnity and order; and

¹Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture", BRPR (October, 1847), pp. 505-506.

²Ibid., p. 509. Cf. LCH, pp. 13f, 226f. These included regular attendance of church, memorizing the Westminster Catechism, family prayers and Biblical instruction. "During later years he always caused his family to repeat after him at morning worship the Apostles' Creed, and a formula, of his own composition, professing personal consecration to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost."

that they have generally occurred in connexion with the use of the ordinary means of grace," without "measures of doubtful propriety and dangerous tendency" of emotionalism. He went on to advocate the building up of the church through Christian instruction which should be primarily done by parents with Sunday School teachers and others as auxiliaries.¹ But in the following year, Hodge declared his distaste for revivals and said that in every part of the country could be observed the growing "mistake" of placing a "disproportioned reliance... on the proclamation of the gospel from the pulpit, as almost the only means of conversion." Among the deplorable results of this, contended Hodge, were the neglect by even professed Christians of "the appointed, the natural, the normal, and ordinary means" for the salvation of the children of the church - namely infant baptism and corresponding careful Christian nurture.²

The decline of infant baptisms among the communicant members of the Presbyterian Church was reported in 1857 by J.H. Baird as having dropped from 198 baptisms per thousand communicants in 1811 to 52 per thousand in 1847 to 51 per thousand by 1856. At this rate, it was concluded, two thirds of the eligible Presbyterian children were "'cut off from their Church' by their parents' act, in that brief period of time." Among the causes which Baird suggested

¹Hodge, "Narrative of the State of Religion: Adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, and Addressed to the Churches under Their Care", Minutes of the General Assembly (Old School) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Vol. 1845-1847 (Philadelphia, 1846) pp. 220f.

²Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture", BRPR (October, 1847), pp. 518-521, 509-510.

had produced such a neglect of infant baptism was what Hodge had earlier pointed out as revival influences and the neglect of the children's Christian training in the home. "Another cause of neglect is, the Church's failure to recognize baptized children as members after baptism."¹

This latter point was Hodge's dominant theme in his 1858 article, "The Church Membership of Infants". But it was in response to Thornwell's report on the proposed Revised Book of Discipline that Hodge made clear a church's responsible relationship to its baptized children. Thornwell, as chairman of the General Assembly's committee, had proposed:

All baptized persons, being members of the church, are under its government and training, and when they have arrived at years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of members. Only those, however, who have made a profession of faith in Christ, are proper subjects of judicial prosecution.²

Hodge, also on the committee, preferred the old Book of Discipline's answer as to who were subject to church discipline. "All baptized persons are members of the church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline; and when they have arrived at the years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of church members."³ Hodge said that Thornwell's proposal made a false distinction between baptized and professing members, declaring the latter alone to be subject to judicial process.

¹J.H. Baird, "Neglect of Infant Baptism", BRPR (January, 1857), pp. 82f, 91f.

²Hodge, "The Revised Book of Discipline", BRPR (October, 1858), p. 698.

³Ibid.

Thornwell's argument was that the church discipline should be applied only to those who recognized and accepted the obligations of a profession of faith. Even baptized children could not do this. Their baptism did entitle them to a technical membership, but like the privilege of the Lord's Table, children do not have the privilege of discipline because they are not full members of the church by their own profession. Until they would voluntarily profess conversion, they were "unregenerated members" and "enemies of God". It would be an unreasonable exercise of government by the true members of the church "to treat a child like a man, a sinner like a saint, an unbeliever like a professed follower of Christ." Thornwell was trying to diminish the distinction between the true church and the visible church, but at the same time he had virtually admitted the insignificance of baptism and had certainly ignored Hodge's stand on the covenant.¹

Hodge contended that we have relinquished ground to the Independents and Anabaptists unless we hold that the children of believing parents, by elected birthright presupposed in baptism, are regarded and treated as members of the church and that their baptism involved their right to church privileges and their subjection to ecclesiastical laws. The fact that they are not admitted to the Lord's Supper is because certain other requisite qualifications are demanded, other than membership in the visible Church catholic.²

¹Thornwell, Writings of...Thornwell, IV, pp. 326f, 332f, 338-350.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), pp. 604-605. Hodge's protests were effective enough to table the adoption of the Revised Book of Discipline until 1862, when it was amended in accordance with Hodge's views. Revised Book of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1862), pp. 3-4.

For Hodge, the church had not only a power of discipline over its baptized children, but the right later when the child reached an age of discretion to recognize again or reject their membership. "Confirmation", declared Hodge, is a "solemn service, in which those recognized in their infancy as members of the Church, on the faith of their parents, are confirmed in their church standing, on the profession of their own faith...."¹ When Hodge calls confirmation a "necessary sequence" to pædo-baptism, he reveals again the subjective conditional aspect of baptism and seems to question infants' actual church membership as Thornwell had done. In order for children to be recognized as full members, a church requires the baptized youth to show a competent knowledge of Christian doctrine, to be free from scandal and "to make a credible profession of a change of heart."² If these conditions are met, it appears that Hodge considered the baptismal covenant as valid; that is, the child had ratified the acts and assumed the obligations of his parents and was thus admitted to a communing church membership.

It is difficult not to conclude that Hodge's low view of baptism was derived from his doctrine of election, his rigid distinction between the true Church and the visible Church, and what some have contended to be virtually a Nestorian view of Christology.³ For him, baptism was not a sacramental ingrafting

¹Hodge, "Presbyterian Liturgies", BRPR (July, 1855), p. 445.

²Ibid., pp. 445-446.

³James H. Nichols, Romanticism In American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961), pp. 255-256, 103-104.

into Christ's Body or a sign of participating in Christ's Baptism.¹ Instead, it was merely one of the divinely sanctioned ways in which professed Christians could publicly confess faith in the possibility of their being federally imputed with the benefits of the covenant of grace. The fact that baptism is a precept gives it its importance and necessity, but it still remains a mode of confession or demonstration of obedience.² It has been shown that this is especially true of Hodge's view of infant baptism, for its importance lay in the parents' dedication of their child to God. It benefits the parent by allowing them to exercise their piety and it benefits the child by reminding a church that it should treat the professor's child as one of their members.³ That Hodge could contend that all persons in a church society need not be baptized in order to be members seems to make meaningless even his covenantal argument for infant baptism causing it to be a dispensable, moral sign or rite.⁴

In January of 1846, after Hodge had made a caustic denunciation of Romanistic external rites as destructive of true religion, he then went on to remark about those whom he contended held a "mystical doctrine of the Church....With these views we have in this country

¹Not only did Hodge fail to think of baptism as our incorporation into Jesus Christ, but he did not treat adequately Christ's incorporation into our estranged humanity and His assumption of our humanity in His Life, Death and Resurrection. This is the very ground of our baptism.

²Hodge, "The Church Membership of Infants", BRPR (April, 1858), pp. 385, 356, 358.

³Ibid., pp. 388f; LCH, pp. 398-399.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1863), p. 485.

little concern, nor do we believe they are destined to excite any general interest, or exert any permanent influence."¹ Three months later, John W. Nevin of Mercersburg Seminary published his book The Mystical Presence, which was to create a stirring interest in the sacramental nature of the Church and eventually engage Hodge in a polemic debate on the Lord's Supper. Pointing out the defection from the Reformed doctrine of the Church and baptism, which Hodge had virtually done, wrote Nevin

If the sacraments are regarded as in themselves outward rites only, that can have no value or force except as the grace they represent is made to be present by the subjective exercises of the worshipper, it is hard to see on what ground infants, who are still without knowledge or faith, should be admitted to any privilege of the sort. If there be no objective reality in the life of the Church, as something more deep and comprehensive than the life of the individual believer separately taken, infant baptism becomes necessarily an unmeaning contradiction.²

But Nevin's starting point was the significance of the spiritual, real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, such that participants actually realize their communion and incorporation into the whole person of Jesus Christ. So strong was this conviction, that Nevin wrote,

As the Eucharist forms the very heart of the whole Christian worship, so it is clear that the entire question of the Church, which all are compelled to acknowledge, the great life-problem of the age, centres ultimately in the sacramental question as its inmost heart and core. Our view of the Lord's Supper must ever condition and rule in the end our view of Christ's person and the conception we form of the Church. It must influence at the same time, very materially, our whole system of theology, as well as all our ideas of ecclesiastical history.³

¹Hodge, "Theories of the Church", BRPR (January, 1846), p. 157.

²Nevin, Mystical Presence, p. 149.

³Ibid., p. 3.

It was against the sacramental Christology and ecclesiology of Nevin's Mystical Presence that Hodge made an attempt to defend his rationalistic doctrine of the Lord's Supper, which had primarily a devotional value for individuals in a worshipping church.

Doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

When Hodge attempted to interpret the Reformed doctrine on the Eucharist, he first sought to define the nature of the presence of Christ.

The word presence...is a relative term, and cannot be understood without reference to the object said to be present, and the subject to which it is present. For presence is nothing but the application of an object to the faculty suited to the perception of it. Hence, there is a two-fold presence, viz., of things sensible and of things spiritual. The former are present, as the word imports, when they are prae sensibus, so as to be perceived by the senses; the latter, when they are presented to the intelligence so as to be apprehended and enjoyed.¹

This common sense rationalism forced Hodge to rule out not only transubstantiation and consubstantiation, but also any dynamic, real, spiritual presence of Christ. For Hodge, the only alternative to the material presence of Christ was a mental awareness of the doctrine of Christ's Atonement.

Although the bread and wine are received by the mouth, this is just an external rite wherein the virtue of Christ's death is comprehended by the mind of a true believer. The spiritual object, presented for the communicant's memory, is "the manner and nature of Christ's death", and not "his birth, or his life or his history".

¹Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), p. 244.

Hodge argued that when believers are said to receive the body and blood of Christ, they only receive "the virtue of his body as broken and of his blood as shed, that is, their sacrificial efficacy", and do not receive any mysterious virtue from Christ's humanity or influence from the glorified body of Christ in heaven.¹

As we have seen, Hodge's very Christology so emphasized the Atonement that he virtually held Christ's Incarnation to be merely a temporary, expedient form to make expiation possible.² This led Hodge to his abstract conception of the imputation of Christ's sacrificial benefits which alone are set forth in the Eucharist. For Nevin, there was a real solidarity of the communicant with Christ's Atonement expressed in the Lord's Supper. "The Bible knows nothing of a simply outward imputation, by which something is reckoned to a man that does not belong to him in fact." Affirming that the imputed merits of Christ's sacrifice are communicated in the sacrament, Nevin also believed, "The legal union, to be of any force for the imputation that is here required, must be a life union. In the very act of our justification, by which the righteousness of Christ is accounted to be ours, it becomes ours in fact by our actual insertion into Christ himself."³ Hodge rejected this as "subjective justification" and "Romanistic". We cannot "become partakers of the

¹Hodge, "The Lord's Supper in Relation to Christ's Death", PS, p. 336; "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), pp. 249-254. Cf. Hodge, ST, III, pp. 645-647; IC, pp. 187f, 225f.

²See our pp. 27f.

³Nevin, Mystical Presence, pp. 190-191, 180f.

righteousness of Christ, by partaking of his nature."¹ He seems to conclude that the only spiritual object which can be admitted in connection with the Lord's Supper is the truth of Christ's atoning death.

Except for the 1549 Consensus Tigurinus, Hodge was hesitant to appeal to Calvin, especially to his "private authority", for therein to Hodge was an "uncongenial foreign element" in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper - namely, the admission of "a life-giving influence (which) emanates from the glorified body of Christ."² But Calvin had first said that the life of Christ was the true and real basis of the imputed atoning benefits communicated to us in the Eucharist. "I do not see how anyone can trust that he has redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, unless he relies chiefly upon a true participation in Christ himself. For those benefits would not come to us unless Christ first made himself ours."³ Calvin had used strong language to assert that the "signification", "substance" and "effect" of the Lord's Supper all emphasize the communicant's participation in the whole Person of Christ as well as the benefits of His sacrificial death. Although he recognized that Christ's glorified body remained in heaven throughout the sacramental action which necessitated the exclusion of the transfusion of the material substance of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist, Calvin, however, did

¹Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), pp. 270f.

²Ibid., pp. 250-251. Cf. Ibid., pp. 233f.

³Calvin, Institutes, IV, XVII, 11.

acknowledge without equivocation that the flesh of Christ gives life, not only because we once obtained salvation by it, but because now, while we are made one with Christ by a sacred union, the same flesh breathes life into us, or, to express it more briefly, because ingrafted into the Body of Christ by the secret agency of His Spirit we have life in common with Him. For from the hidden fountain of the God-head life was miraculously poured into¹ the body of Christ that it might flow from thence unto us.

For Calvin, communion with the Person of Christ meant communion particularly with His flesh, for only by and in His humanity was the divinity of Christ accessible to people. But the presence of Christ's humanity or body in the Lord's Supper seemed to Hodge to imply either a Roman Catholic or a Lutheran doctrine.² Hodge could not see what Nevin pointed out was Calvin's intention - which was to carry back the communicants' "salvation" to "Christ's life, as its necessary perpetual source and ground" and to urge "the vivific side of the Christian mystery (Christ's whole Person being present in the sacrament) always as the proper complement of the sacrificial."³

Hodge argued that this aspect of Calvin's doctrine was in-

¹This comes from Calvin, "Mutual Consent of the Swiss Churches" cited in T.F. Torrance, Conflict and Agreement in the Church, 2 Vols. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960) Vol. II, p. 143. For a concise exposition of Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, see R.S. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), pp. 197-233 and Torrance, Conflict and Agreement, pp. 140f.

²Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine, pp. 200f; Hodge, E, pp. 344f; John Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, Trans. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), pp. 208f.

³Nevin, "The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper", Mercersburg Review (September, 1850), pp. 421-548, partially contained in The Mercersburg Theology, ed. James Hastings Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 247, 249.

consistent with the Bible, with the Reformed faith and with his own position in the Consensus Tigurinus and, therefore, should be denied as a genuine portion of the Reformed system of doctrine.¹ Thus when answering the question, "What is the effect of receiving the body and blood of Christ?", Hodge interpolated the reception of the substance of Christ as a possible reception of the Holy Spirit or in other terms, "union with Christ, and the consequent reception of his benefits."² "We receive Christ himself when we receive the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ; we receive the life of Christ when we receive his Spirit, who is the Spirit of life."³ Nevin claimed that because Hodge's view of the Incarnation had a "Gnostic style", he could not recognize that worshippers have a real participation in the "human side of Christ's life" and not merely in His Spirit.⁴ It does appear at times that Hodge almost separated the Christ of the Spirit in faith and experience from Jesus Christ of the historical Incarnation.

¹Hodge's position was that the Eucharist had only to do with the benefits of Christ's death and could not express any union or communion with Christ's Humanity, because "It is impossible that those living before the advent could partake of Christ's body..., because it did not exist," and yet, His sacrifice was effectual for their salvation. Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), pp. 252-254. To set out his view of Reformed tradition, Hodge appealed mainly to Francis Turretin and used a Zwinglian interpretation of only the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession and the Consensus Tigurinus. The last of these proved to Hodge "that Calvin avowed his agreement with Zwingli and Oecolampadius on all questions relating to the sacraments." Ibid., pp. 237f; Hodge, ST, III, pp. 631f, 646-647.

²Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), pp. 254-255. Cf. Our pages 50f.

³Ibid., p. 267.

⁴Nevin, "Doctrine of...the Lord's Supper", Mercersburg Theology, p. 250.

Hodge seemed to temper his view of the Lord's Supper by contending that through its celebration communicants could have a "union of feeling and affection" with Christ or share "in the fulness of his human sympathy and love."¹ However, it was in virtue of the prior indwelling of Christ's Spirit in each of "God's chosen" that the Lord's Supper was allowed to be an act of communion either with Christ or fellow worshippers. "Believers are one body and members one of another, not in virtue of their common human nature, nor because they all partake of the humanity of Christ, but because they all have one Spirit."² This led Hodge to argue for intercommunion. If the effect of the reception of Christ at the Lord's Supper presupposed that each true worshipper was being animated by the same Spirit to profess his faith in this way, then all participants must therefore be inwardly and universally united. The Lord's Supper became a mutual act of Christian piety or fellowship underlying "all superficial, outward and transient" differences of ecclesiastical organizations or distinctions between "all ages, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, barbarian, Scythians, bond and free."³ The puzzling fact that Hodge, on the one hand, could unceasingly advocate open communion because it was a way of expressing the catholic spiritual union of all professing Christians, and, on the other hand, could avidly protest against the union of Old School

¹Ibid., p. 256; Hodge, ST, III, p. 639.

²Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), p. 256. Cf. Hodge, E, pp. 344f.

³Hodge, "Christian Fellowship as Expressed in the Lord's Supper", PS, pp. 334-335.

and New School Presbyterian Churches seems to rest with his perennial problem of separating the invisible from the visible. It seems that he could not take seriously that the celebration of the Lord's Supper meant the actual communion with the present living Christ, so as to participate corporately in His very life and to manifest dynamically His visible body. In one sense Hodge seems to be antinomian. He failed to see fully that we ought to be what we are in Christ. If we are one in Him, not merely spiritually or doctrinally, but bodily, our righteousness in Him unconditionally binds us to show forth His Body as one to the world.

But to return to the other effect of receiving Christ's body and blood, which Hodge reported to be the benefits of Christ's atoning death, if these must already be imputed to the communicant, his reception of them again is simply a mental rehearsal of their doctrinal content. "To remember Christ, is our great duty in this sacred service."¹ It seems that Hodge, in effect, viewed the worshipper as receiving a symbolic memorial of a metaphysical truth which, if intellectually apprehended, could confirm and perpetuate his own prior knowledge of Christ's sacrificial and atoning death. The act of reception, as we have seen, was an act of confessing Christ or a mode of obedience and as such enhanced one's piety.

In Hodge's writings, the agency and the conditions for efficaciousness corresponded to the effects which might be produced by attending the Lord's Supper. We have often noted the sole and unique role Hodge gave to the Holy Spirit and how, unless the Spirit

¹Hodge, "Communion Sunday Service", "Unnumbered Sermons, Preached and Repreached Between 1823-1876", MS H6624un at P.T.S.

attends the Eucharist, nothing is conveyed to the Christian. We should also remember that, for Hodge, the Spirit does not always accompany the Lord's Supper. This can only mean that the sacrament can be void of grace or divine power unless God wills otherwise. In respect to man, the presence of the Holy Spirit depended on true faith which implied a credible knowledge of Atonement. Unless the truth of the Lord's Supper as a memorial of Christ's death be understood, nothing is present to the mind and the Holy Spirit cannot operate on it.¹

Nevin observed that Hodge's doctrine of the Eucharist turned wholly on the worshipper's mind at last, whether the relation between the sign and the thing signified shall be of any force whatever in the transaction; if his faith be so exercised as to bring the general truth of the Atonement into connection with what is going forward, the truth will be there, otherwise (according to Hodge's views) the institution² will stand shorn of its celestial significance altogether.

In his Mystical Presence, Nevin had argued that the sacrament, taken as a whole, carried with it an

objective force, so far as its principal design is concerned. It is not simply suggestive, commemorative, or representational. It is not a sign, a picture, deriving its significance from the mind of the beholder. The virtue which it possesses is not put into it by the faith of the worshipper in the first place, to be taken out of it again by the same faith, in the same form. It is not imagined of course in the case that the ordinance can have any virtue without faith, that it can confer grace in a purely mechanical way. All thought of the opus operatum, in this sense, is utterly repudiated. Still faith does not properly clothe the sacrament with its power. It is the condition of its efficacy for the communicant, but

¹Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), pp. 256-257; PS, 332; WL, pp. 197-199: Cf. our pp. 198f.

²Nevin, "Doctrine of...Lord's Supper", Mercersberg Theology, p. 248.

not the principle of the power itself. This belongs to the institution in its own nature. The signs are bound to what they represent, not subjectively simply in the thought of the worshipper, but objectively, by the force of a divine appointment. The union indeed is not natural but sacramental.¹

Hodge admitted that the Eucharist had a "moral objective power" apart from faith. "But the question is what is the source to which the influence of the sacraments as means of grace, is to be referred?" This can only be the Holy Spirit, whose "power is in no way tied to the sacrament", but "may be extended without them."² Hodge, in effect, seemed to believe that the Holy Spirit did not convey grace in a unique way at the Lord's Supper, because He may use any outward occasion to bring the faith of the truly pious into felt communication with God's truth and grace.

Nevin exposed the absurdity of Hodge's view. "The Spirit may work on men's minds, exciting pious thoughts or feelings of devotion, by the presence of a majestic cataract, or a whirlwind, or a smiling beautiful landscape; and why not then with equal ease through the graphic and affecting representation of the blessed Eucharist?"³ Nevin held that the sacrament's source of power or influence was Christ's real mystical presence. In a divinely appointed manner transcending the experience of sense or reason, and by the "mirifical power of the Holy Ghost, the life-giving virtue of his flesh and

¹Nevin, Mystical Presence, p. 61.

²Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), pp. 256f, 274f.

³Nevin, "Doctrine of...Lord's Supper", Mercersburg Theology, p. 248.

blood is made to be dynamically at hand, in a real and true way, for the use of his people," who receive Christ's whole Person and Work in faith.¹ It was this Christocentric Eucharistic position that led Nevin to believe in the sacramental nature and mission of the Church. The Church's foundation is the great fact of Christ's Incarnation and sacramental fulfillment; its life is one of continual and corporate participation in His real mystical presence, while historically moving toward the completion of its new Creation at the Second Coming of Christ. The Church's union and communion with the living Christ is visibly manifested best in the Eucharist. Because sacramental grace is promised in Christ's Person, is conveyed by the Holy Spirit and is received by faith, the Eucharist is no mere pious, static, or speculative mode of worship, but is truly an objective means of grace through which the Church must spiritually feed upon Christ for its bodily nourishment and growth.²

¹Ibid., pp. 250-251.

²Besides the two previously cited writings of Nevin, his Christological views of the Church and the sacraments, which dominated most of his publications between 1844 and 1854, are reprinted in part under the section "Christ and the Church", Mercersburg Theology, pp. 33-119, and Nevin, "Introduction", Philip Schaff, The Principle of Protestantism as Related to the Present State of the Church (Chambersburg, Pa.: "Publication Office" of the German Reformed Church, 1845), pp. 3-27. These views reflected a scholarly, historical awareness of the Early Church through the Reformation, which had never before been seriously studied in American Theological circles. Nevin, along with his colleague Schaff, broke from the prevailing Scottish "common sense" philosophy and the theological, rationalistic supernaturalism of pre-Kantian America and appropriated aspects of German idealism and Schleiermacherian Christology. These unique roles together with his heightened sense of the corporate character of the church in opposition to the individualism, revivalism and sectarianism of American Protestantism, placed Nevin in conflict with the ecclesiastical provincialism of his time. His Christocentric and

Hodge responded to Nevin's position by saying, "Its whole spirit is churchy", "is in its essential element a psychology", and "has a strong affinity for Sabellianism."¹ For Hodge, the Lord's Supper, like a visible church, is too visible and too community-oriented to be admitted as real and unique means of communion with Christ. It can only be one of the ordinary, divinely sanctioned modes of confessing faith. If the profession during the celebration is intelligent, sincere and made by an elected individual, then the Holy Spirit might confirm the communicant's religious knowledge and affections. Since a church society in their ordering of public worship should include at times the celebration of the Lord's Supper, they must allow any worshipper who has made credible profession to partake of the elements. Even though Christians are morally obligated to profess their faith this way, they still "must be so instructed that they will be kept back from making profession of a faith they do not possess, by their own consciences; and those who act unworthily of their Christian profession should be subjected

Contd.]

ecumenical orientations, prior to his emotional affinity to Roman Catholicism in the mid-1850's, bear strong similarities to Twentieth Century concerns. Professor Nichols of Princeton University contends that Nevin "was a pioneer in this reorientation (of Calvin's doctrine of the spiritual real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper) and is perhaps still its most competent theological interpreter." James H. Nichols, "John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886): Evangelical Catholicism", Sons of the Prophets: Leaders in Protestantism from Princeton Seminary, Ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 78. Cf. Nichols, Romanticism In American Theology. pp. 84-106.

¹Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), pp. 273, 275, 276.

to the discipline of the Church."¹

We are now able to read between the lines and to see what Hodge really meant by using orthodox language to summarize his doctrine.

The Lord's Supper is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, as a memorial of his death, wherein, under the symbols of bread and wine, his body as broken for us and his blood as shed for the remission of sins, are signified, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, sealed and applied to believers; whereby their union with Christ and their mutual fellowship are set forth and confirmed, their faith strengthened, and their souls nourished unto eternal life.

Christ is really present to his people, in this ordinance, not bodily, but by his Spirit; not in the sense of local nearness, but of efficacious operation. They receive him, not with the mouth, but by faith; they receive his flesh, not as flesh, not as material particles, nor its human life, but his body as broken and his blood as shed. The union thus signified and effected, between him and them is not a corporeal union, nor a mixture of substances, but spiritual and mystical, arising from the indwelling of the Spirit. The efficacy of this sacrament, as a means of grace, is not in the signs, nor in the service, nor in the ministry, nor in the word,² but solely in the attending influence of the Holy Ghost.

To conclude Hodge's position on the sacraments in general, these critical observations should be made. Hodge's starting point is the necessity of sacraments, in terms of the people's moral duty, to show by obedient confession their Christian faith and dedication at public worship. By not beginning with Christ's self-sanctifying obedience, it can be understood why Hodge gave no real importance to the Word (read or preached) accompanying the administration of the sacraments, but instead, dismissed the Word as unessential to the

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 625.

²Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church", BRPR (April, 1848), p. 258. Cf. Hodge, ST, III, pp. 621-623, 637-650.

ordinances.¹ Hodge was so blinded by the sacraments being rites (i.e., the elements being physical and Jesus Christ's human nature being just temporarily physical) that he could not see the significance of the sacramental event communicating the once-and-for-all sacramental fulfillment in the totus Christus - his whole Person and Work. Although Hodge assigned objective meaning to the sacraments, he made them so dependent on the mental and subjective condition of the communicant that they became a means of grace only as an act of faith in the doctrines exhibited. Hodge admits that only true believers can receive the benefits of Christ's atoning death, because only they have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit or been spiritually reborn. But is not our rebirth in Christ Himself? When Hodge spoke of the sacraments in terms of a judicial covenant which presupposed election, he in effect evacuated the value of Christ's action and relationship to the communicant, and replaced it with a metaphysical and static relationship due to an abstract divine decree. His talk of union with Christ can only mean prior union with the Spirit and remembrance of Christ's death. There is no allowance for the sacraments to signify the primary fact of Christ's incorporation into us in the Incarnation. If he had considered this and thought of the sacraments as related to the life of the risen Christ in His Church, there would be the elements of dynamic movement and anticipation in both his sacramental and ecclesiastical doctrines. It could be questioned whether even Hodge's emphasis on "sacrificial efficacy" does not divorce the sacrifice from both the priesthood of Christ and His continuing mediatorship as ascended Lord. Without any

¹Hodge, ST, III, pp. 579, 507; E, pp. 326-328,

corporate eschatological dimensions objectively included in the sacraments, Hodge was not able to think of them as cementing the invisible and visible Church and engaging it as the one Body of Christ in the mission of reconciliation, which Christ at His Second Coming would consummate. That Hodge had such low, almost anti-sacramental views has been lamented by numerous writers as having greatly encouraged many American Presbyterians of his lifetime to distort the true Calvinistic view of both the Church and the sacrament.¹

Structuring a Self-Propagating Organization

Hodge reasoned that among the things which distinguished a church from either a voluntary society associated for a benevolent cause or the casual and temporary assemblies of worshipping Christians were the structural bonds which subjected the people to the same form of government, the same doctrinal standards, the same

¹LCH, p. 330; John B. Adger, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper", Southern Presbyterian Review (October, 1885), pp. 785-800; Adger, "Calvin Defended Against Drs. Cunningham and Hodge", Southern Presbyterian Review, (January, 1876) pp. 155-166; Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom: with a History and Critical Notes. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), Vol. I, p. 376; Charles A. Briggs, Church Unity: Studies of Its Most Important Problems. (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1910), pp. 269f; Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, pp. 95f, 141f, 155, 257f.; Nichols, "John Williamson Nevins", p. 77; H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, Lefferts A. Loetscher, Eds. American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents. 2 Vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), Vol. II, p. 94; By comparing A.A. Hodge's 1870 Commentary on the Confession of Faith, pp. 327-363, with his last publication, Evangelical Theology: A Course of Popular Lectures (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1890), pp. 355f, it can be surmised that even Hodge's son departed from his father's low view of the sacraments, at least in respect to the real, active presence of the "entire indivisible divine-human Person of Christ."

rules of discipline and one common tribunal.¹ In this aspect of the people's power of order, Hodge re-asserts the general right of their representatives to participate in forming these bonds into written ecclesiastical documents. Here we begin to see Hodge's shift from the individualistic to the organic dimension of a church society. This will become more evident in our last chapter, where the common tribunal is given ultimate constitutional power. But at this point Hodge was protecting his starting point for establishing a church polity. That is, all individuals outwardly associated have the moral duty and thus the power and the right to sustain the purity of their society and to expand its bounds.² Even though all power of order belongs by its spiritual nature to every professing Christian, the exercise of this intrinsic power affects others; therefore, it is expedient that especially this power, as well as the power of keys, should be written up as an agreement or contract of how the society will limit its use of them. Thus Hodge defined an ecclesiastical constitution as basically "a treaty entered into by primary church organizations as to the manner in which they shall exercise the powers inherent in them and derived from Christ."³

When the people had participated with ministers in drawing up this document, it became, on the one hand, a "declaration of the powers" which belonged to their ministers and representative councils,

¹Hodge, "Is the Church of Rome a part of the Visible Church?", BRPR (April, 1846), pp. 328, 330.

²Hodge, "Church of God", "Sermons", MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1850), p. 470.

and, on the other hand, a "set of laws" for "convenience", "expediency" and "self-perpetuation" of their church organization.¹ However, this written agreement was not analogous to a civil constitution (i.e., the Constitution of the United States), in which, as Hodge claimed, were embodied those powers given to it by the citizens, thus making the document itself a grant of powers and an instrument of authority. Any particular church council is automatically vested with all ecclesiastical powers, be they legislative, judicial or executive, because its membership already inherently possess these. Therefore, no church council needs such powers either delegated to its constituents by other councils or conveyed to them by an ecclesiastical constitution. Hodge concluded that the representatives of the people in a council can only use the constitution as a safety device to perpetuate the basic principles of government and discipline which were originally agreed upon by the church's founding fathers.² But whereas a council of clergy and elders can do nothing the constitution forbids, it can do

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 441; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), pp. 473f; "Rights of Ruling Elders", BRPR (April, 1843), pp. 320f.

²Hodge, "The Princeton Review and the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), pp. 642f; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), pp. 481f. It should be noted that for his own church society, Hodge and the majority of Old School Presbyterians thought that the people had automatically accepted the Constitution of the Church of Scotland founded in the Seventeenth Century Westminster Standards, with the exception of the portion of the magistrates' relation to the church. Identifying his church as a "genuine daughter of the Church of Scotland", often forced Hodge, as we shall see in our last chapter, into extreme preoccupation with constitutional disputes and the ecclesiastical machinery in order to perpetuate Scottish Presbyterianism in America. Ibid., pp. 488f; Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), pp. 465f; LCH, p. 281.

anything which the document does not enjoin.¹ It was on this principle that Hodge often used the constitution of his own denomination as an instrument to establish the primacy of the General Assembly's power to exercise general, immediate and final jurisdiction over the whole church. This was especially evident in respect to that body using, what Hodge called, "the acknowledged principle that where a specific power is granted, all subordinate powers necessary for its proper exercise are also granted."² In effect, Hodge considered that the General Assembly's constitutional status not only allowed it to establish a utilitarian polity evolving out of its supreme original power, but also that it could secure the fidelity of all the church to its (and Hodge's) interpretations of the Constitution.³

But to return to the cornerstone Hodge used in abstractly building up a doctrine of the organized church, he argued that included in the people's power of order (which overlapped with their power of doctrine) was the "consent" they gave to the clergy's framing and authoritatively setting forth a creed which was to be embraced by the whole society. Hodge proposed what appeared to be three general reasons why the people should actively co-operate in establishing a written confession of faith. First, the people need

¹Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1837), p. 444.

²Hodge, "Voluntary Societies and Ecclesiastical Organizations", BRPR (January, 1837), p. 115.

³Again it is because Hodge assumed this position mainly in his polemics surrounding the splits of the American Presbyterians, which forces us to delay the historical context of this until he treats his last principle of church organization - the unity of the church.

a documented consensus on what they believe to be the system of doctrine which the Bible teaches, so that they can publicly declare to those entering her communion as well as to the world their society's "testimony for truth and her protest against error." Second, it follows that if "creeds profess to express the mind of the Church", they must be voluntarily adopted by the people, and not merely the clergy. Third, as an externally united church must perpetuate not only its special polity but its unique system of doctrines, the people must continually use their confessional standard to judge and select their rulers and ministers.¹

Once the confession or consensus of doctrinal truths had been agreed upon and set out, as in the case of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, Hodge believed it to contain three classes of doctrines: "those common to all Christians", "those common to all Protestants" and "those peculiar to the Reformed Churches" or whatever doctrinally distinguishes their sect from another.² It was to this last class that in Hodge's mind, the church society was morally obligated to demand of its elders and clergy continual and strict subscription. He reasoned that if the principles of common sense and intuitive honesty are used then there could be no difficulty for anyone to interpret the confession and to determine this last class. This method would dismiss requiring the adoption of "every proposition" of the confession and at the same time would reject the "latitudinarian principle" which allowed an elder or a minister to subscribe only to

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", pp. 400, 403.

²Hodge, "Adoption of the Confession of Faith", BRPR (October, 1858), p. 689.

the "substance" of the confession or the "essential doctrines of religion." It would require the person seeking ministerial communion to accept sincerely and to teach faithfully the plain, historically and universally acknowledged system of doctrines which gives his church society a special confessional identity. Demanding this strict subscription to the third class as a condition for holding a teaching or ruling office is the only way a church can practically be self-propagating.¹

¹Ibid., pp. 670-691; Hodge "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1867), pp. 502-522. In reference to his own sect's confession, Hodge was often in polemics with the New School, some of whom had an affinity to the "New Haven Theology" (see our pp. 347f). These Presbyterians required of their ministers and elders only a qualified subscription to the Westminster Standards, or only the substance of the distinctive Reformed doctrines. Great protector of scholastic Confessional Calvinism as he was, Hodge increased the number of doctrines in the "third class" from 5 in 1858, when he was mainly concerned with internal Old School inquiries, to 19 in 1867, when he was avidly fighting the movement to reunite the Old School and New School churches. Fearing that the New School's policy of qualified subscription might prevail in a united church, Hodge wrote, "This lax principle must work the relaxation of all discipline, destroy the purity of the church, and introduce either perpetual conflict or deathlike indifference." Ibid., p. 514. It must be understood that for Hodge the Westminster Confession and Catechisms was not only his Church's "witness for the truth", but was "that great system of truth which in all ages has been the faith of the great body of the people of God." Ibid. This signified three things. First, that rather than viewing the Bible as containing the Westminster system of doctrines, Hodge believed the Confession contained "the system of Doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." LCH, p. 281. Although the Old School Standards do not interpret every Biblical passage (this is why Hodge opposed having his church issue a commentary on the Bible in accordance with the Westminster doctrines. Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1858), pp. 559f.), they are "an exposition of the word of God, admitted as authority among (true) Presbyterians." "The Princeton Review and the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), p. 648. Second, that Hodge sincerely believed that his thought, the Westminster system of doctrines and the Theology of the Bible were one and the same. In a letter to a Scottish friend, Hodge wrote, "I have had but one object in my professional career and as a writer, and that is (to) state and to vindicate the doctrine of the Reformed Church. I have never advanced a new idea - and have never aimed to improve on the doctrines of our fathers. Having
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Hodge argued that by necessity this ruled out the people of the church acting through interdenominational voluntary societies in selecting its ministers. Instead, the people must secure the fidelity of their own ministers only in their organized ecclesiastical capacity. That is, each separate society must both examine its ministers before ordination and be prepared to use their powers of discipline to judge and to punish any minister in its fold who strays from that church's particular confessional doctrines. However, Hodge pointed out, "Reason and experience alike demonstrate that the perfunctory examination before an ecclesiastical body is altogether an inadequate barrier to the admission of improper men into the ministry, and that by far the most important security lies in the education and selection of the ministers themselves." Therefore the decisive means that every church has to preserve and extend "its peculiar system of opinions", as well as polity, and thus to control its own "destiny", is the thorough education of its ministerial

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become satisfied that the system of doctrine taught in the symbols of the Reformed Churches is taught in the Bible. I have endeavoured to sustain it and am willing to believe even when I cannot understand." Letter of August 24, 1857, Box 7, "Papers of Charles Hodge", MSS in Princeton University Library. By casting his theology in Confessional Calvinism, Hodge contended that he had "advanced no new theories" and had never had "an original idea in theology." Hodge "Retrospect of the History of the Princeton Review", BRPR: Index Volume, p. 11. Third, it followed that Hodge consistently demanded strict adherence by all Presbyterian elders and ministers to these scholastic Reformed doctrines. As one modern critic says, Hodge's position was that anyone who "challenged them or evaded their literal meaning was to be treated like a foolish knight errant or a traitor." Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey", The Shaping of American Religion, Vol. I of Religion in American Life, eds. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 263. But even more significant, Hodge seemed to hang the very life and mission of his own church on its faithful preservation of this confessional system of truths.

candidates in the society's confessional standards.¹ Hodge argued that this can be done most efficiently by denominationally controlled theological seminaries, especially if the professors of these seminaries are admitted, constrained and retained according to whether or not their theology and lectures strictly coincide with the church's Confession.²

¹Hodge, "Voluntary Societies and Ecclesiastical Organizations", BRPR (January, 1837), pp. 112-113.

²It seems that Hodge had in mind the oath his church exacted of each professor of Princeton Theological Seminary. "I do solemnly, and ex animo adopt, receive, and subscribe the Confession of Faith, and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as the confession of my faith;...a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief which is contained in Holy Scriptures....I do solemnly promise and engage, not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate anything which shall appear to me to contradict, or contravene, either directly or impliedly, anything taught in the said Confession of Faith or Catechisms...." After appointment, each professor was required to present to the Board of Directors, who controlled Princeton for the General Assembly, "a detailed exhibition of the system and method which he proposes to pursue and the subjects which he proposes to discuss...and in this system he shall make such alterations or additions as the Board shall direct; so that, eventually, the whole course through which the pupils shall be carried, shall be no other than that which the Board of Directors shall have approved and sanctioned...." "Constitution of the Seminary", Baird, Collection, p. 436. Cf. Hodge, "Adoption of the Confession of Faith", BRPR (October, 1858), p. 681. By such restrictions, as Philip Schaff pointed out, it was "almost impossible to make any doctrinal progress 'directly or impliedly'." Philip Schaff, Theological Propædæutic: A General Introduction to the Study of Theology, 2 Vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), Vol. II, p. 391. But such was the basic design, according to Hodge and the Old School Presbyterians, of a church-controlled, confessionally bound seminary education. As Professor E.A. Smith analyzes the Princeton plan, "By these measures, the Presbyterian Church believed it could be assured that the spring of the gospel flowed uncontaminated in the church and that the church membership could be safeguarded from the pollution of the ministry of Christ by the poisons of infidelity." Smith, Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture, p. 122.

In addition to the power of adopting constitutional form of government and confession of faith, Hodge contended that the people had the power and were obligated to order rules of discipline that would provide a judicial structure to their organization, hence a book of discipline. This concerns the common obedience to and just application of their ecclesiastical laws and doctrines in order to maintain and to perpetuate the purity of society's Christian communion as well as its ministerial communion. This is all understood in what Hodge also called the people's power of keys.

Power of Keys

By the power of keys Hodge meant "the power the people have to receive or to exclude from the fellowship of the church and to discipline their own membership."¹ This seems to be basically an enlargement by Hodge on the qualifications necessary for celebrating the sacraments. But here he attempted to expound a church's power to control the essential faith and practice of its individual members and ministers. First involved was the people's power to use the terms of communion and the principles of ethics as the ground for discipline, and second, the actual administration of discipline.

¹Hodge, "Church of God", "Sermons", MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S. Cf. Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", pp. 401, 404. It is significant that the power of keys is purely judicial for Hodge and not also kerygmatic. Calvin wrote, "It (forgiveness of sins) is dispensed to us through the ministers and pastors of the church, either by the preaching of the gospel or by the administration of the sacraments; and herein chiefly stands out the power of keys, which the Lord has conferred upon the society of believers." Calvin, Institutes, IV, i, 22.

Terms of Communion and the Principles of Ethics as Grounds of Discipline

Hodge denounced those who confounded the terms for ministerial communion and the terms for Christian communion.¹ The former, as we have seen, was strict subscription to the entire Constitution and Confession, but the latter was "unalterably fixed in the word of God, and can be neither increased nor diminished by any human authority."² However, Hodge wrote, "It seems plain that we are not at liberty to make every truth contained in the word of God, a term of communion....It is only those things which are clearly revealed, ...only those about which Christians cannot safely differ."³ And as he so often contended, the universally acknowledged scriptural terms for church fellowship are knowledge of the "essential doctrines of the gospel" (the first class of the confession's doctrines which are all that are necessary for salvation) and "nothing more than credible evidence of Christian character."⁴ If a person has met these two and only these two terms, he is already a member of the visible Church catholic and thus has scriptural authority and spiritual right to join any church society and share in its privileges. Therefore, because no society can alter these terms but must receive all whom Christ might receive, the organized Christians have no power or right to require of individuals seeking

¹Hodge, "Discourse on Religion by Mr. Coit", BRPR (October, 1840), pp. 589.

²Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1851), p. 551.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 453-454.

⁴Hodge, "Discourse...by Mr. Coit", BRPR (October, 1840), pp. 595, 591.

to join their fellowship any particular views about such things as social customs, politics, church-state relations nor about liturgy, church government, or the more restrictive confessional doctrines. However, Hodge said that once the person had been received by a church, he should abide by the particular views agreed upon by the people as to how the powers of order are exercised and should also submit to the society's administration of discipline.¹

It appears that Hodge translated these broad terms of Christian communion into narrow grounds of discipline. He admitted that every sin or departure from the Bible's standard of moral law was an offense, but the occasions which call for the people to exercise discipline and to punish their members who do not conform to terms of Christian communion are when the individual's character and conduct are of a gross and scandalous nature. In order to prevent persons from determining by privately interpreting the scriptures whether another person has an unacceptable Christian character which warrants church censure or exclusion, all Christians are bound in matters of discipline to their society's agreed confession as "a faithful exposition of the system of doctrines and rule of duty taught in the Bible."² Hodge pointed out that dissensions among even the people using their church's standards to determine ecclesiastical offenses of impiety could be easily resolved if they did not pervert the "ultimate" of "elementary principles of ethics."³

¹Hodge, "Church of God", "Sermons", MS Al.Alc. at P.T.S.

²Hodge, "The Revised Book of Discipline", BRPR (October, 1858), pp. 695-697.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 463.

It seems that Hodge developed his ethical reasoning within his application of natural theology.

It makes all the difference in the world, whether a thing is wrong in itself, or for reasons extraneous to its own nature. If it is wrong in itself, it is always wrong; and it should be opposed in a way entirely inadmissible on the supposition that¹ it is, in its own nature, a matter of indifference.

For Hodge, what is right or wrong by nature is identical to the moral government of God, which in the first place is innate in man's moral nature or empirically evident in the constitution of the world. The rule of duty or piety for a professing Christian rests upon his outward conformity to those universal and perpetual laws God has "designed to regulate human character and conduct."² "The common doctrine of Christians...is, that the will of God is the ultimate ground of moral obligation to all rational creatures."³ Even though God's will is always free, Hodge observed that it is "indeed inconceivable that God should violate his word....(which) proves that moral certainty may be as inexorable as necessity."⁴ Therefore, by moral certainty we know those things which God has said are right or wrong. For Hodge the content of this divine will concerning ethics was approached anthropocentrically. "The will of God is the expression or revelation of his nature, or is determined

¹Ibid.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 262. It should be remembered that true piety is an internal, spiritual matter and cannot be judged by any church. Ibid., p. 576.

³Hodge, ST, I, p. 406.

⁴Ibid., p. 403.

by it."¹ He declared that the "fundamental principle of all religion" allows us to arrive at a "true knowledge" of God's nature by ascribing "to Him all the attributes of our own nature as rational creatures, without limitation, and to an infinite degree."² Therefore, in effect it seemed that Hodge began his ethics by attributing man's natural dignity and innate sense of right and wrong to God's will or moral government. "Independent of all external revelation," every man has an intuitive knowledge of moral truths, obligation and duty.³

But Hodge attempted to protect himself from what appears to be speculative humanism. First, he defined "moral law" as "that which binds the conscience", and since "God alone is the Lord of the conscience", it is God, not man, who authors the perpetual and universal rule of duty.⁴ Second, Hodge believed also that man's innate moral knowledge would increase and strengthen "just as his reason unfolded."⁵ This is why he also defined knowledge of God as "the intellectual apprehension of truth."⁶ When applied to ethics, this meant that until man's moral consciousness matured, he needed to compare his sense of morals or his knowledge on matters of truth and duty with the Bible, which more fully and clearly reveals the nature and will of God and above which there is "no higher

¹Ibid., p. 406.

²Ibid., pp. 339f, 414.

³Hodge, ST, III, pp. 266-267.

⁴Hodge, "The Laws of God", "Lecture Notes, 1824-1849", MS Al. Alc. at P.T.S.

⁵Hodge, ST, III, p. 266.

⁶Hodge, ST, I, p. 393.

standard of moral excellence."¹ Hodge thought that heathen lacked morality not because they were ignorant of the divine rule of duty, but because "their minds are just filled with errors."² This is why, for Hodge, all churches had as their greatest duty or mission the teaching of the Biblical truths, which in addition to revealing the Gospel either corrected or preserved people's understanding of right moral character and conduct.³ "That there are moral precepts in the laws of Confucius," wrote Hodge, "is no proof that his code is binding upon us." They are only one human's ethical opinion, but the "perfection of moral law" recorded in the Bible is the declaration of God, from which "we dare not differ."⁴

It seems obvious that Hodge oriented his ethics toward natural morality and not toward the revelation of Jesus Christ as the church's ontological fulfillment of the law. He believed that Christ was "the ultimate standard" or perfect example of good moral behavior.⁵ This is why he always insisted that each student would have a "greater degree of morality" if every system of public education required Biblical instruction. Let the child be made

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 270.

²Hodge, Teaching Office of the Church, p. 3; R₂, pp. 32-41. Because of his concept of natural theology, Hodge taught that "all men are inexcusable for their impiety even when ignorant of the sacred scriptures." Hodge, "Nature and Source of Theology" (August 30, 1847), "Lecture Notes, 1824-1849", MS A1.Alc. at P.T.S.

³Hodge, Teaching Office of the Church, pp. 2f; Hodge, The Place of the Bible in a System of Education (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1833), pp. 11-13.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1842), p. 515; ST, III, p. 270.

⁵Hodge, I C, p. 204.

acquainted with Jesus, "how he felt toward God, and how he acted towards man; how he treated the poor, the afflicted, the ignorant, how he bore afflictions, and sustained injuries; how he lived, and how he died - and he will know more of morals than all the world can teach him."¹ Hodge did not think that Christian ethics was participation in and witness to Christ's self-sanctification. This is understood by the way he considered the role of Jesus Christ to be mainly one of satisfying divine justice. Even the Holy Spirit sanctifies outwardly in reference to Biblical, moral laws and not according to the New Creation. From our standpoint it seems that Hodge assigned nothing unique to the life and mission of a church in terms of Christian behavior except that it was the guardian of a divine lawbook on ethical humanism, which it used to remind and to enforce upon its members their innate moral obligations. Nevertheless, he saw fit to refer to these laws of piety as Christian principles and precepts.

Therefore, when a church seeks grounds for disciplining impiety, it must use only what the Bible declares to be right or wrong by nature and must not judge anything which might be right or wrong by circumstantial interpretation. Hence the two ultimate ethical principles are: "(1) That everything that the Bible pronounces to be wrong, is wrong; that everything which it declares to be right, is right. (2) That nothing is sinful which the Bible does not condemn; and nothing is obligatory on the conscience which it does not enjoin."²

¹Hodge, Place of the Bible in a System of Education, pp. 4, 10.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 270.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to treat each Biblical law that Hodge felt called upon to expound, but it is worth noting how he ranked them in four different classes. The first and highest class contains those laws founded on God's nature or attributes. To this belongs "the command to love God supremely, to be just, merciful, and kind. Love must everywhere and always be obligatory. Pride, envy and malice must everywhere and always be evil." These laws are always "immutable and indispensable", because to change them "would imply, not merely a change in the relations of men, but in the very nature of God."¹ The second class of laws is founded on the divinely ordained constitution of things or the relations of men on earth, and these laws are of perpetual and universal obligation. They concern stealing, killing, observing the Sabbath, holding property, marriage, the duties of inferior to superiors (in families, state and church), etc. As an example of when one of these laws should give way to the first class, Hodge argued that homicide in self defense, capital punishment and certain wars could be justified, because judicial punishment and self-preservation are "an instinct of our nature, and therefore a revelation of the will of God."² The third and fourth classes are not necessarily perpetually or universally obligatory and should be subordinate to

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 267; "Sermon: Romans 13:1," MS H6624s at P.T.S. In this latter source Hodge states clearly that these laws are based on "Theism". Again it is obvious that he could not have meant they were based on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, because he preached that these are "laws of our moral nature instilled in us at creation." Hodge, "Sermon, New Series, 1-47", No. 14, MS H6624sf at P.T.S.

²Hodge, ST, III, pp. 363-367.

the former two classes. They are divine commands addressed to temporary religious or civil circumstances like most of the Hebrew laws which have passed away. However, some could remain in effect if the New Testament sanctioned implicitly or explicitly the continuation of a law's purpose, or if God simply continues to enforce them as a positive precept with "no foundation either in the nature of God or the nature and constitution of things"¹ (which is exactly why Hodge felt it obligatory for professing Christians to form themselves into church societies).² Other examples are that a church and state should be separate, but that obedience to the state is still required by God; or that compulsory circumcision has ceased, but professing Christians are morally obligated to be baptized.

This classification and ranking of Biblical edicts seems to have given Hodge considerable difficulties and forced him into inconsistencies when he applied them to judging piety for the purpose of church discipline. As an example we look at a case brought before the 1842 General Assembly in which a North Carolina Presbyterian minister, who had married his deceased wife's sister, had been excluded from both Christian and ministerial communion. When Hodge defended this judicial decision, in effect he used the first class to establish the loving relationship in the home between sister-in-law and living wife's husband, so that they feel and treat each other like sister and brother. Then using what he admits to

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1842), p. 515.

²See our pp. 129f, 134f.

be a "marginal translation" of Leviticus 18:6f to imply that "wife" meant "widow", he declared that when a man marries his sister-in-law after his wife's death, there is a violation of a perpetual precept, in this case incest. "All mankind is forced to regard (this) as sin." And in this case the Presbytery, heeding the laws of justice, peace and purity, had to give more than a "mere reprimand" as punishment. Discipline had to be "exclusion from the privileges of the church" until such time as the "party gives evidence of repentance."¹ However, Hodge also believed that this offense was only against

a positive law, or only in a secondary sense moral, and therefore dispensable,...(because) sacred obligation of the marriage contract is more obligatory than the positive law with which it is in conflict. If a man is in such circumstances that he cannot comply with both of the two laws, it is a plain principle that the weaker law gives way, or ceases to be binding.²

In essence this case forced Hodge to admit that there may be dissensions and diversity of grounds for exercising discipline even in a church whose members use the first "ultimate" principle of Biblical ethics.

When Hodge expounded the second basic principle of ethics (ethical relativity or what he called the principle of expediency), he drew angry protests from every section of his denomination at one time or other. Basically this principle was this: on all things "indifferent" or action which might be right or wrong according to the situation and not to Biblical law, "every man must be allowed to

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1842), pp. 497-521, esp. pp. 509f.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 453.

decide and act for himself. He is not to subject his conscience or conduct to the judgment of others,"¹ be they church, state or public opinion. Expediency involved anything not explicitly "commanded or forbidden by the Word of God."²

Hodge gave several guidelines for using this principle. The most important was that it is wrong for individuals to make use of this ethical liberty when it might offend the conscience of others. "The conscience is said to be defiled either when it approves or cherishes sin, or when it is burdened by a sense of guilt." Therefore, if we love our brother, we should abstain from doing something which, although we judge it to be indifferent, might cause him to feel guilty and to sin.³ The law of love should direct our motives in using expediency, but our abstinence should involve no sacrifice of moral truth.⁴ "If it would sanction any false doctrine, or tend to establish any false principle of duty, the compliance would itself be wrong; because it is far more important, and far more useful for others, that the truth should be kept pure than that those who are weak or ignorant should not be offended."⁵ It seems at times that

¹Ibid., p. 466.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 262. It should be noted that Hodge's hermeneutical principle allowed implicit scriptural interpretations deduced from "common sense" principles. Hodge, MS Lecture: "Hermeneutics" (February, 1824), File D at P.T.S. This method was partially the cause of his being at variance with others on what were the Biblical directions for church social action.

³Hodge, I C, pp. 146f.

⁴Hodge, R₂, p. 325.

⁵Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 465.

Hodge emphasized rational truth at the expense of practical love or ecclesiastical social action. He once preached that "the edification of the church...(and) the welfare of mankind depends far more upon maintaining the authority of God and the supremacy of his law, than upon the success of any human schemes of outward reformation."

Many indeed think that a perpetual and universal obligation may be founded upon expediency. But this is impossible. It involves a contradiction. It is saying that the obligation arises out of peculiar circumstances and yet is independent of all circumstances; that a thing is wrong only in particular times and places, and yet is always wrong. If a thing is wrong only on the ground of expediency, it is sometimes right and sometimes wrong according to circumstances and therefore it is impossible that expediency can be the foundation of an universal and perpetual obligation.¹

The two main American social movements of Hodge's day were those advocating the abolition of alcohol and slavery. In these separate movements there was a firm and sometimes fanatical conviction among their many respective supporters that these were not matters of indifference, but that implicit within the Biblical message was a divine sanction for the churches to take immediate action to cleanse society of these evils and to discipline or exclude any church members or ministers who persist either in having any relationship to alcohol or to the holding of slaves.²

¹Hodge, "Sermons, New Series, 1-47", No. 21, MS H6624sf at P.T.S.

²The National Temperance Convention held at Saratoga, New York in July of 1841 declared, "That the tendency of all intoxicating drinks to derange the bodily functions, to lead to drunkenness, to harden the heart, sear the conscience, destroy domestic peace, excite to the commission of crime, waste human life, and destroy souls; and the rebukes and warnings of God in his word in relation to them, in connection with every law of self-preservation and of love, imposed

Hodge admitted that intemperance and slavery were great social evils which individual Christians should assist in removing. However, he believed that these were wrong according to their circumstances and not to their nature or the law of God. Drinking, making or selling alcohol is not necessarily sinful unless done excessively.¹ Likewise, holding slaves is not sinful if the master treats his slaves as rational and moral creatures who merely owe him their full allegiance and labors.² The Bible permits both these

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upon all men a solemn moral obligation to cease forever from their manufacture, sale and use, as a beverage, and so unitedly call upon us as men and Christians, not to pause in our work until such manufacture sale and use, shall be universally abandoned." (Cited in Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 464.) At the organization of the American Anti-Slavery Society in December, 1833, it was stated that slavery was an "audacious usurpation of the Divine prerogative,... a presumptuous transgression of all the holy commandments." Its members declared, "We shall aim at a purification of the churches from all participation in the guilt of slavery." "The Declaration of Sentiments" issued by the founders of the militant Anti-Slavery Society is contained in Smith, Handy, Loetscher, American Christianity, Vol. II, pp. 186-190.

¹Hodge, "Retrospect", BRPR: Index Vol. pp. 17-19.

²Ibid., pp. 15-17. However, Hodge pointed out that because slavery assumes a moral relationship between master and slave, a church can discipline any violation of this relationship. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to expound Hodge's participation in the American slave issue, it is interesting to note some of his general rationalizations which resulted from his heavy reliance upon natural or moral law. For him slavery, in itself considered not sinful, was involuntary servitude, domestic despotism or a state of bondage and was founded first, on the nature and providential form of society, and second, on the sacred rights of property. The very constitution of society supposes the forfeiture of certain natural rights and liberties, because the "promotion of human virtue and happiness" (for which God intended a society to be organized) cannot be attained otherwise. Thus females, minors and slaves in the United States had almost no legal existence, and it "would be an immorality to require or to effect the change." Hodge, "Slavery", BRPR (April, 1836), pp. 289-291. "The right to personal liberty is conditioned by the ability to exercise that right." "There is no foundation in

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and nowhere condemns them, therefore they are not sinful by nature, but instead are matters of indifference which only the individual conscience must judge and act upon.

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morals for the reckless application of 'the doctrine of inalienable rights' to the case of slaves, who from their physical, intellectual or moral condition, they are incompetent to exercise the rights of freemen." While all people are of one blood and by nature have the same essential attributes (color of skin makes no difference), the separation of races and "the protracted operation of physical and moral causes, have given each its peculiar and indelible type. And where there is diversity there is sure to be superiority." It is the "indisputable" fact, argued Hodge, "that at present, in all parts of the world, the blacks as a race are inferior to the whites." In this condition the blacks ought to be removed from the United States because: 1) "there are nature laws which forbid the union of distinct races in the same commonwealth", 2) if Negroes were deported, America would receive "the greatest of all temporal blessings", and 3) Negroes as expatriots could "carry with them the seeds of religion, civilization and of liberty to an entire continent (Africa)." However, if the institution of black slavery remains in a community, slave-holders should not try to perpetuate it by deliberately trying to keep their slaves "in a state of ignorance and degradation in order to perpetuate their bondage", for "the right to intellectual culture and moral and religious education is the most precious of all human rights." This is why Hodge believed only in "gradual emancipation" which follows "gradual improvement." Hodge, "Emancipation", BRPR (October, 1849), pp. 601, 587-588, 591, 594-596, 602-603. Immediate emancipation is not a Christian duty for it would destroy the nation. Besides, "Christianity 'operates as alternative.'" It was never designed to tear up the institutions of society by the roots." "Slavery", BRPR (April, 1836), p. 292. One of the most sacred of these institutions is the right of property, which is exactly what a slave is to his Master. "Property is the right of possession and use, and must of necessity vary according to the nature of the objects to which it attaches. A man has property in his wife, in his children, in his domestic animals, in his fields and in his forests. That is, he has the right to the possession and use of these several objects according to their nature. He has no more right to use a brute as a log of wood, in virtue of the right of property, than he has to use a man as a brute. There are general principles of rectitude obligatory on all men, which require them to treat all the creatures of God according to the nature which he has given them. The man who should burn his horse because he was his property, would find no justification in that plea either before God or man. When therefore it is said that one man is the property of another, it can only mean that the one has a right to use the other as a man, but not as a brute or as a thing. He has no right to treat him as he may lawfully treat his ox, or a tree.

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Hodge held that the church should not take a stand on these and other circumstantial matters, nor should it use them as grounds for testing piety or for disciplining its members. No rule of

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He can convert his person to no use to which a human being may not, by the laws of God and nature, be properly applied. When this idea of property comes to be analyzed, it is found to be nothing more than a claim of service either for life or for a term of years. This claim is transferable, and is of the nature of property, and is consequently liable for the debts of the owner, and subject to his disposal by will or otherwise." Ibid., pp. 293-294. Hodge said that "the relative position of men in society determined by the accident of birth" secures the fact that children born of slaves should remain slaves. "Such an arrangement cannot in itself be sinful, because God ordained it; nor does the light of nature contradict this decision...." Neither does it matter how a slave is acquired or how long is his bondage; he must remain the valid property of the master, who alone can release him. "Abolitionism", BRPR (October, 1844), pp. 558-563. As property no slave should be freed without just compensation being given to his owner. "Emancipation", BRPR (October, 1849), pp. 593-594. No doubt this is one of the reasons Hodge on the dawn of the Civil War "heartily" joined "in the condemnation of all resistance to the restoration of fugitive slaves." "The State of the Country", BRPR (January, 1861), p. 20. A slave-holder who holds this view of slavery or "domestic despotism" has committed no sin. However, to treat his property according to its nature "he must act in obedience to the gospel, which teaches that the labourer is worthy of his hire, and that a fair compensation must in all cases be made to him; which requires all appropriate means to be used for the intellectual and moral improvement of our fellow men, and especially that free access should be allowed them to the word of God, and to all the means of grace. This is the gospel method of dealing with slavery", which will also bring about its gradual disappearance. "American Board,...", BRPR (January, 1849), p. 40. While slave-holding itself is a matter of indifference, a church should exhort its members to hold these views and discipline those slaves and masters who violate the Biblical laws. "Abolitionism", BRPR (October, 1844), pp. 578-581. Hodge never considered the question of the degree of improving slaves for which the master might escape church censure. See our pp. 280f for how he shifted his emphasis from the church's responsibility of securing pious relations between its members and their slaves to the church's responsibility of repealing unjust state slave laws.

conduct founded on expediency (use or abstinence of things the Bible is silent about) can be enforced by the people's power of keys.¹ The people of a church society can only discipline according to the moral law which is founded on the nature and will of God and the constitution of creation, which is innate in every man and which is more clearly revealed in the Law-giver's Book.

Even though Hodge stressed that ethical expediency must be the unique responsibility of the individual, professing Christian and should not be used by a church to determine communion or discipline, he was not always ready to apply it to his own denomination's ecclesiastical procedure. If a Christian wished to transfer to another local church or a minister to another presbytery, the receiving body may refuse the applicant on grounds of inexpediency, even though this refusal could implicate the character of the applicant. Rhetorically Hodge asked,

One church thinks that slave-holding, slave-dealing, the use and manufacture of ardent spirits, are consistent with a credible profession of Christianity; are those churches which think differently to be bound to receive members on certificate from such a congregation?.... Would a southern presbytery be bound to receive an abolitionist who felt it to be his duty to speak and preach on the subject of slavery as many ministers speak and preach in the north? Would it not be competent for a presbytery to say to such applicant, you must be a very good and proper man for the north, but here you would do more harm than good?²

It seems evident that Hodge perverted his own ultimate principles of

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 265; I C, p. 151; "Church of God", "Sermons", MS Al.Alc. and "Sermons, New Series, 1-47", No. 21, MS H6624sf at P.T.S.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1835), p. 468.

ethics which his church, he contended, should use in deciding Christian character and conduct for terms of communion and grounds of discipline.

Administration of Discipline

It is unnecessary to go through all the judicial procedures which the American Presbyterian Book of Discipline included, but we should note again Hodge's interpretation of the agents, the subject, the nature and the stages of discipline. First, the agents who exercise the people's power of discipline are normally their elected representatives or elders, because it would be inexpedient otherwise.¹ Second, the proper subjects of discipline are all members of the church society which, as we have seen in Hodge's argument on baptism, included all professing members and their baptized children who have not blatantly renounced either their own or their parents' baptismal vows.² Once a professed Christian and his children have joined a church society, they may never withdraw from the moral obligation of submitting to that church's discipline. They may voluntarily reject their doctrinal profession, but they still remain subjects of ecclesiastical censure until excommunicated.³ Hodge was less concerned with the disciplining of laymen than of ministers. The former should only be tried if they had a disgraceful character and conduct, either causing scandal to other members or grossly endangering their external piety. It should be remembered that Hodge

¹See our pp.136f, 155f.

²See our pp.194f, 209f.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1848), p. 412.

believed it unrealistic to call an organized church society a "communion of saints", and that he held that holiness was only an individual, true Christian's attribute. For him, the real subjects deserving close discipline were always the ministers, because it was their main job to teach doctrinal truths. And if the people allowed the clergy to teach any heresy, it could be detrimental to the uniqueness and the perpetuity of their church society.

But as both classes of subjects can only be tried for an offense against the society's standards, the nature of the punishment of those convicted can only be ministerial and spiritual, that is, "it neither extends over the conscience", nor can it "inflict civil pains or penalties."¹ However, the former of these limitations on church censure seems unreconcilable with Hodge's exposition of the stages of discipline, all of which prevent the offending party from performing his morally obligated church duties.

Admonishing or rebuking sins is not, properly speaking, a society's disciplinary responsibility, but that of either an individual Christian or minister. "Suspension, excommunication and deposition are the only sentences" a church court can judicially inflict upon an offender of ecclesiastical law.² Suspension is the temporary exclusion of a Christian from not the church society but all privileges of that society. The chief example of this is the barring of an offender from the celebration of the Lord's Supper

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 448.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1839), p. 437.

for a short or long season. Excommunication is the permanent exclusion of an offender for open apostasy from the church. It seems that Hodge would be hesitant to recommend this, but he admitted that if any person ceased "to profess the true religion,... by denying its doctrines,...he should be cut off."¹ In recommending that different church societies should recognize "the validity of each other's acts of discipline", Hodge wrote

If the legitimate terms of membership are the same in all; and if the lawful grounds of exclusion are also the same, then it follows that a man excluded from one church should be excluded from all other churches. The meaning of the act of suspension or excommunication is, that the subject of censure is unworthy of Christian fellowship.² If this be true in one place, it is true in every place.

Deposition is a sentence applied only to church officers, both elders and ministers. Hodge reasoned that because it was founded on some proven heresy or moral crime, it simply declared the person unfit for his office, or in the case of a minister that he was never really "called of God to preach the gospel."³

According to Hodge "demission" was not an act of church discipline. Instead it was a voluntary removal from church office by an elder or minister who in their respective situations judged themselves never really qualified for their office. An interesting point about this is that Hodge also thought that any church council to which these officers belonged equally had the right to call upon

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1848), p. 412.

²Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), p. 285.

³Hodge, "Demission of the Ministry", BRPR (April, 1859), p. 367.

them to demit their office. When this idea is coupled with his demission theory of churches legitimately releasing their members to other church societies, we can see why, on the one hand, Hodge defended the right of the 1837 General Assembly to banish from its ministerial and Christian communion those people whom it believed constitutionally unqualified for either office or membership, and whom it also declared were "distracting the peace and destroying the purity" of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. And on the other hand, he could say that this act was not judicial or disciplinary for it "deposed no minister and excommunicated no church member." To Hodge it was simply a legislative-executive act which dissolved church courts and demitted certain members by setting aside their admission in the first place as unconstitutional.¹

Whereas an offender may appeal his disciplinary sentence to the highest court of his church society because that assembly is the "court of the last resort", its decision (or its act in the cases where it exercises original jurisdiction) is of necessity "final and irreversable."² Hodge advocated that the General Assembly should handle disciplinary disputes by judicial commissions, which conceivably could be validly composed solely of ministers. This revealed how he removed the ultimate power of keys and the decisive exercise of that power from the people - whose power he had originally

¹Ibid.; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1851), pp. 550-553; "Discourse on Religion by Mr. Coit", BRPR (October, 1840), p. 593; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1837), pp. 419f, 453f, 462-467; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), pp. 485-486n, 487f.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 413-416.

used to construct the right and privilege of church discipline.¹ Although he tried to protect himself by saying that the individual may disobey and protest for conscience sake the deliverances and judgments of the supreme church council, Hodge insisted that if anyone does not "conform to the form of government and discipline which (they) have voluntarily adopted", then he is schismatic and deserves the penalty for his disobedience.²

Power of Doctrine and Teaching

From what has been said of Hodge's ecclesiology, it is naturally understood that the people have the obligation and the power to teach their constitutional form of church government and doctrine to their own members and to secure the fidelity of all to such teaching. Beyond this, a church also has the responsibilities of teaching all peoples and nations the Gospel as the plan of salvation and of declaring and enforcing upon them the moral law. Not all churchmen or even Presbyterians agreed with all that Hodge said about the methodology of the former of these responsibilities, or that the latter was within the province of a church's power.

Teaching the Gospel to the World

Every Christian is obligated by Christ's commission to teach the Gospel. In a church society which is primarily an "educational institution", they are bound to use all the means available to

¹Hodge, "The Revised Book of Discipline", BRPR (October, 1858), pp. 717f; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 409f; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1855), pp. 506-508.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), pp. 492f.

instruct the heathen in the saving doctrines which cannot be known by "the light of nature." Hodge thought that the church must act on the following principles. 1) God will save whom he has elected. 2) The elect must have faith to be saved. 3) Knowledge of the plan of salvation is necessary before faith. 4) Instruction in these essential doctrines is required for knowledge. 5) Spiritual discernment and feelings might follow if the Holy Spirit attends this cognitive process, but for this a church is not responsible. 6) However, her duty is to teach the true religion to as many as possible as effectively as possible. "Everything necessary for the accomplishment of this object, comes within the scope of her commission, and assumes the nature of a divine command."¹

The primary method of exercising this power is by preaching. Although the people cannot preach, for this is normally the function of ministers,² they can see to the education, the examination, the sending forth and the support of domestic and foreign missionaries. This involved several controversial points in addition to that of establishing church controlled seminaries which we observed earlier. First, the people could examine and pass for ordination ministers who were to be exclusively evangelists or missionaries. This Hodge pointed out was in opposition to what he called the "fundamental principles of original congregationalism" which were: that no man

¹Hodge, Teaching Office of the Church, pp. 3-4; ST, I, pp. 25-30, II, pp. 261-265, III, pp. 85-88; "The Knowledge of the Gospel necessary for the Salvation of the Heathen", PS, pp. 325-362; "The Education Question", BRPR (July, 1854), p. 531.

²See our pp. 305f.

could be a minister without a particular congregational charge, that preaching was lawfully done only within this independent group of Christians, and that if a man left his pastorate to work in a heathen area, he ceased to be a minister. Hodge said that when Presbyterians first came to America, they had to abandon the Scottish and English laws forbidding ordinations sine titulo, because the sparsely settled Christians could never have formed parishes. Instead, the circumstances called for more ministers than organized churches. But the ground for a church sending out missionaries is that they must accept that ordination recognizes a man to be a minister to the visible Church catholic. Hodge believed that good churchmen were coming to an agreement on this, as evidenced by the prolific missionary programs of the American churches.¹

Nevertheless, the means of sending out missionaries, argued Hodge, should be only in the hands of separate denominations, for otherwise the people cannot control the character and destiny of their own society. Therefore the people have the right and power to establish church boards to control their own missionaries' education, selection and ministry in the field. On the one hand, Hodge opposed the voluntary societies of his day which assumed these responsibilities, because they operated independently of ecclesiastical control.² He questioned the character and orthodoxy of both the

¹Hodge, "American Board,...", BRPR (January, 1849), pp. 3-5; "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 371-372; "The Elder Question", p. 268.

²There were numerous local benevolent groups devoted to solving the chronic shortage of ministers in the early part of Nineteenth Century America and organized to send out and supervise missionaries

membership and activities of certain interdenominational societies, but his opposition to them seemed to be more political than theological. That is, the issue seemed really to be the survival of the Old School Presbyterian sect. Although this position will be expanded in our last chapter, the point here is that when Christians exercise their power of teaching in conjunction with their ministers preaching to all peoples, they must use only those means which adhere to Presbyterian order and doctrine. Therefore, they should have their own denominationally controlled Board of Education, Board of Domestic Missions and Board of Foreign Missions.

But not all Old School Presbyterians who rejected the voluntary societies agreed that the church should conduct the cause of missions by means of central ecclesiastical boards. This second point of dispute centered on the question of whether or not the people could delegate their power of teaching to a semi-independent church agency. We recall Thornwell's jure divino concept of church government expressed in his debate with Hodge during the 1860 General Assembly.

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to the expanding western frontier as well as to foreign, heathen lands. But Hodge leveled his criticisms largely against three of the strong national organizations, whose memberships included laymen and clergy from all the major churches. These were The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (founded in 1810), The American Education Society (1815) and The American Home Missionary Society (1826). The major arguments of Hodge for the Old School position against these voluntary societies are contained in these articles: "Remarks of the Editors on Dr. Moses Stuart's Examination of the Review of the American Education Society", BRPR (1829), pp. 602-638; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1836), pp. 421-440; "Voluntary Societies and Ecclesiastical Organizations", BRPR (January, 1837), pp. 101-137; "American Boards, . . .", BRPR (January, 1849), pp. 12-21. It should be noted however that Hodge admitted that these societies may financially assist church boards if they do not usurp the denomination's ecclesiastical authority.

"God gave us a Church, a Constitution, laws, Presbyteries, Assemblies, Presbyters, and all the functionaries necessary to a complete organization of His kingdom upon the earth and to its effective operation." If "you can do only what the Scriptures command", reasoned Thornwell, then having church boards is contrary to the divinely revealed ecclesiastical order. Delegating the work of missions to a board is creating an independent "organism" to do the very work of the church and even allows them to speak for the whole church in their respective areas. Boards "have weakened the general influence of the idea that the Church herself is a Missionary Society, and that every member of the Church is to have a part and to be responsible for a share in the work." Thornwell expressed his disgust at the practice of "entitling of men for money to become consulting members of the Church or of her Boards." Continuing, he said,

Moderator, I have confidence in the men who control our Boards, and whilst in their hands we may escape the more serious evils which we dread, yet, even now, there is discernible in the Boards a disposition to act independently of the Assembly. Like Lord Chatham to his constituents, the Boards have been heard to say to the Assembly, "We regard not your instructions, for we have too much regard for your interests." ¹

Hodge responded to this by appealing to the discretionary power of a church society to use any ecclesiastical agency not for-

¹Thornwell, "Debate Touching Church-Boards", Writings of... Thornwell, Vol. IV, pp. 218-224. From 1841 on Thornwell had advocated a more direct control of missions by church officers by constantly arguing that boards were mere transplants of the formerly supported voluntary societies, and that committees dependent on or organs of the church should co-ordinate missionary activities of the different presbyteries. Ibid., pp. 145-216. Cf. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1855), pp. 532-540.

bidden by the Bible to carry out the common task of teaching the true religion. And the "only rational" and most efficient manner in which the people can do this is through central boards. Although these have "delegated powers", their actions are always subjected to the review and control of the General Assembly. Hodge accused Thornwell of "hyper-hyper-hyper-High Church Presbyterianism", and Thornwell in turn labeled Hodge's principles of the people's discretionary authority to delegate their power as "no, no, NO Presbyterianism, no no, NO Churchism!"¹

Hodge pointed out a third way in which the people should support the preaching of the Gospel to all people. This involved giving all ministers an adequate or guaranteed financial backing so that poor areas could also hear the Gospel. Hodge first approached this idea in 1844 when he applauded the efforts of the Free Church of Scotland to create a common fund for the building of churches and support of ministers.² Even though he developed the idea more fully in his 1847 review of Thomas Chalmers', An Earnest Appeal to the Free Church of Scotland on the Subject of Economics,³ and fostered it throughout his lifetime, this plan never met with a great deal of acceptance. As Hodge pointed out, the American churches from their formation had to depend on voluntary contributions for existence, and most

¹Thornwell, Writings of...Thornwell, Vol. IV, p. 228, 232; Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), pp. 563-567; our pp.

²Hodge, "Claims of the Free Church of Scotland", BRPR (April, 1844), pp. 252f.

³Hodge, "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 360-378.

Presbyterians had always operated under the false rule that "every minister has been left to depend on those to whom he preached. The inevitable consequence of this system is that those who are unwilling or unable to support the Gospel are left in ignorance."¹ Hodge admitted that the poor are practically excluded from the Presbyterian Church.

In our cities we have no churches to which the poor can freely go, and feel themselves at home....as a general thing, the churches are private property. They belong to those who build them, or who purchase or rent the pews after they are built. They are intended and adapted² for the cultivated and thriving classes of the community.

These churches of the rich could sustain a preacher, but no provision, argued Hodge, was being made for preaching to the destitute. Another consequence of the old plan of having solely the congregation responsible for giving support to its minister was that "if they are not able to furnish it, he must either suffer or turn to some secular occupation," the latter of which often makes the minister "a secular man."³

Hodge proposed a "sustentation fund" which was to be a sum raised by annual contributions from every Presbyterian in order to carry out "two principles, first, that every minister of the gospel devoted to his work is entitled by the command of Christ to a competent support; and secondly, that the obligation to furnish that

¹Hodge, "Preaching the Gospel to the Poor", BRPR (January, 1871), p. 87.

²Hodge, "Are there too many Ministers?", BRPR (January, 1862), p. 143.

³Hodge, "The General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1854), p. 576.

support rests upon the church as a whole."¹ He repeated many of his previous arguments to defend these principles.

The first principle, contended Hodge, rested on the scriptural fact "that they who preach the Gospel shall live of the Gospel," "without resorting to other means of support", because "'the laborer is worthy of his hire'. He has a right to it. To withhold it from him is an act of injustice. It is dishonest."² Also it is

unwise to make preaching the gospel to the poor a penalty; to punish those who undertake that service with poverty, and force them to forego the privilege, or to see their wives sinking into domestic labourers, and their children growing up without means of cultivation....(For this will) produce heart burning and discontent in a large class of our ministers.³

The second principle was founded on these main arguments:

1) the command of Christ to preach the gospel to every creature is given to the whole church society as well as the visible Church catholic and imposes this obligation on all its members and not exclusively the clergy. 2) Not every member of a church is called to preach, for this belongs distinctively to ministers who are ordained for the service of the entire church society. But it is each person's moral duty to share the burdens entailed in preaching to those beyond the narrow sphere of his own congregation. 3) If the Holy Spirit does dwell in the members of a church, then they will act and feel as one to the extent of wanting to treat all their

¹Hodge, "Sustentation Fund", BRPR (January, 1866), pp. 9-10.

²Hodge, "Preaching the Gospel to the Poor", BRPR (January, 1871), p. 88.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 500.

ministers justly and to send them to areas too feeble to support the Gospel. 4) Such a principle would secure the services of many unoccupied ministers and employ them in the cities and on frontiers where hundreds of thousands "are living almost in the darkness of heathenism." 5) Also, acting on this principle is "necessary to render the church aggressive. We are falling behind other denominations." Hodge pointed out how, in particular, the Roman Catholic priests and Methodist clergy "plant firm feet" anywhere, because they are sure of being sustained by their church. 6) Finally, secular ministers would become more spiritual with more thought and time devoted to study, to pastoral duties, and to instruction of the youth. And consequently, "congregations too feeble to support the gospel at all, under this steady culture, would soon be able not only to sustain themselves, but to aid in sustaining others."¹

Although this was an admirable proposal, the old plan was too deeply engrained in the Presbyterian churches of Hodge's day. As he pointed out, the cost of setting up such a fund and the suspicion of lazy churches and ministers taking advantage of this scheme were barriers that needed to be overcome.² It is most interesting that Hodge never thought of using this scheme to relieve the actual socio-

¹Hodge, "Sustentation Fund", BRPR (January, 1866), pp. 5f, 17f; "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 367-377; "Preaching the Gospel to the Poor", BRPR (January, 1871), pp. 89-93.

²The essence of Hodge's proposal was finally incorporated by the combined Old School-New School General Assembly of 1871. Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol. 1870-1871. pp. 556-567. The success of initiating such a ministerial sustentation fund was partially due to the acuteness of the problems of an enormous immigration population to which the New School was more sensitive. Also absent from the General Assembly were the Southern Presbyterians, who resisted this innovating scheme of polity "fraught with danger." Thornwell, Writings...of Thornwell, Vol. IV, pp. 482-486.

economic problems of those to whom the Gospel was to be preached.¹

Besides supporting preaching, a second means that the people could use to exercise their power of teaching the Gospel was through their approval, support and use of the programs and publications of their church boards and certain voluntary societies. Ever since the formation of the American Bible Society in 1816, the General Assembly had recommended that all Presbyterians should co-operate with and support the Society's efforts to print and circulate the Scriptures. However, when in 1851 the Bible Society published a revised American edition of the Bible including certain changes in spelling, punctuation and chapter headings of the King James Version as printed in 1811, Hodge and others protested that this had violated the evangelical sense and purity of the Bible and was contrary to the Society's original constitutional promise of publishing the Scriptures "without note or comment."² Once a condemnation of this edition had been officially adopted by the General Assembly, Hodge urged the church to continue their support of the Bible Society's distribution of the former edition. He thought the people could also promote the religious press, especially the Tract Societies and The Presbyterian Board of Publication, provided these were directed only toward enhancing individual piety. He himself wrote his 1841 The Way of Life for the American Sunday School Union.³ But when it

¹See our pp. 300f.

²Hodge, "The American Bible Society and its New Standard", BRPR (July, 1857), pp. 507-542. Cf. "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1857), pp. 472-484.

³The same year it was reprinted by the London Religious Tract Society. LCH, p. 325.

came to the people producing any journal which was to represent a whole church's teaching, Hodge objected. In the 1849 General Assembly, there was a resolution to establish one inexpensive newspaper for the entire denomination. In reaction Hodge wrote, "When a newspaper is to be a mouth-piece of an individual, its authority and influence are great. What will it be when it is the mouth-piece of the church!"¹ Because Hodge also believed it proper for a church to use indirect means of teaching, he was always ready to recommend the American Colonization Society, not just as a benevolent institution, but "as a means designed and adapted to promote the progress of the gospel in Africa."²

Even though Hodge believed that family training, Sunday schools and pastoral instruction were important ways a church should use to communicate and preserve the Gospel, especially to the youth, he declared them "all inadequate". First, the children of unwilling or unskilled parents "grow up in ignorance". Second, Sunday Schools are for all denominations and are usually held only one hour a week, therefore making the teaching too "general" and too short. Third,

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1849), p. 452.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), p. 618. This society, formed in 1817 by those who hoped to re-establish, gradually, freed Negroes in Liberia, was heartily supported by the Presbyterian General Assembly from the start. Baird, Collection, p. 823. But it soon drew contempt from the abolitionists for its conservative, delaying methods of freeing slaves. By the end of the Civil War, it had colonized in Africa, altogether, only 12,000 Negroes. Smith, Handy, Loetscher, American Christianity, Vol. II, pp. 170-171. It was also denounced by Southern Presbyterians toward the middle of the century, who objected to any relationship the church might have with benevolent voluntary societies. Thornwell, Writings of... Thornwell, Vol. IV, pp. 469-478.

even if ministers find time to catechise, it is only with "the children of the church-going part of the population."¹ Hodge felt that the only alternatives left were for the people to teach the Gospel through "the common school" or the state public schools, and if not there, through parochial schools. The former of these were morally obligated to give "religious instruction", but Hodge's argument for this can only be understood under the people's power to declare and enforce the moral law. However, in 1846 he was persuaded that most "good people" believed

that the common school system is rapidly assuming not a mere negative, but a positively anti-christian character; and that in self-defence, and in the discharge of their highest duty to God and their country, they must set themselves against it, and adopt the system of parochial schools; schools in which each church shall teach fully, fairly and earnestly what it believes to be the truth of God. This is the only method in which a religious education has hitherto ever been given to the mass of the people of any country, and the novel experiment of this age and country, is really an experiment to see what will be the result of bringing up the body of the people in ignorance of God and his word. For if religion is banished from the common school it will be excluded from the whole educational training of a large part of the population. It is an attempt to apply to the whole country, what Girard has prescribed for his college. Under these circumstances the church of every denomination is called upon to do its duty, which is nothing more or less than to teach the people Christianity, and if this cannot otherwise be done thoroughly and effectually, as we are persuaded it cannot, than by having a school in connexion with every congregation, then it is the duty of the church to enter upon that plan and to prosecute it with all her energy....If Presbyterians do not have schools of their own, other denominations will soon have the education of Presbyterian children.²

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1846), p. 436.

²Ibid., pp. 439-440. The case of Stephen Girard to which Hodge has referred was brought before the Supreme Court of the United States in 1844 by contesting heirs. The Court upheld Girard's will

But while some were advocating state secular education, there were many, even among the Old School Presbyterians, who felt that "Education is an affair purely civil, purely temporal," even though

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which made a bequest of several million dollars to Philadelphia for the establishment of a college for poor white orphans, subject to the condition that: "No ecclesiastical, missionary, or minister of any sect whatsoever, shall hold or exercise any duty whatsoever in the said college; nor shall any such person ever be admitted for any purpose, or as a visitor, within the premises appropriated to the purposes of the said college....I desire (said the testator) to keep the tender minds of orphans...free from the excitements which clashing doctrines and sectarian controversy are apt to produce." Cited in Anson Phelps Stokes, Church and State in the United States, 3 Vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), Vol. III, pp. 381-382. Among the other events effecting the religious character of state schools were first, the national trend to remove sectarian influences on the religious instruction included in public education (which itself was being assumed for the first time in this period as a state responsibility). This was spearheaded by Horace Mann, who from 1837 to 1849 served as the first Secretary of Massachusetts's Board of Education (the first State board of education in America). Even though Mann is regarded as the founder of American secular education, because of his success in persuading many national educators to abandon required sectarian religious instruction from their public school systems, he himself never intended to eliminate completely state school religious instruction, provided it was based solely on a non-sectarian study of only the Bible. Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 541f. The other major development was the mass immigration of a heterogeneous population during this period mainly into the cities. From 1831 to 1860, 1,902,219 Irish Roman Catholics and approximately 500,000 German Catholics settled in the United States, which in 1789 had only a few thousand Roman Catholics. Clifford M. Drury, Presbyterian Panorama: One Hundred and Fifty Years of National Missions History (Philadelphia: Board of Christian Education, 1962), pp. 96-97. Most of these were too poor to support their own parochial schools as advocated by Rome, so they had to attend public schools which were using the King James Version of the Bible and anti-Catholic literature as readings in their whole curriculum. Thus, as in New York City during the early 1840's, there began two movements: first, to banish Protestant-oriented teaching and books (including the Bible) from the public schools, and second, (which eventually superseded the first) to demand state funds to support Roman Catholic parochial schools. Cf. John W. Pratt, Religion, Politics, and Diversity: The Church-State Theme in New York History (Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 158-203. The former of these movements, coupled with the influx of Jews, Orientals and non-religious groups, led to the feelings that religious instruction or orientation should be banished altogether

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it should have a general Christian foundation. Therefore it should not "be engrossed by the Church."¹ In reaction to this, Hodge argued that education belonged to a church as well as to the state.

The truth is, that anything, no matter how purely it may be of a civil nature in itself considered, becomes a legitimate matter of Church direction whenever it is a necessary means for promotion of religion. We, however, deny that education is in its nature a civil affair. On the contrary, the training of the youth is of necessity of a² moral and religious nature, as well as intellectual operation.

Hodge's premise was that if a church society is to take

the Gospel to a people who cannot read, she is bound to teach them letters. If she goes where the philosophy, the history, the science, and literature of the people are imbued with irreligious and antichristian principles, she is bound to establish institutions in which all these subjects may be taught in combination with the truth. To deny this right to the Church, is to deny her the power to fulfil her great commission. If she is to reap the harvest of truth, she must break up the fallow ground, and extirpate the briars and thorns, as well as sow the seed. You might as reasonably sow wheat in a jungle, as expect to get Christian knowledge and faith established in minds imbued with the doctrines of heathenism.³

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from the common schools. On August 11, 1853, E.C. Benedict, President of New York's Board of Education, addressed the American Educational Convention. He said, insisting that the State should be solely responsible for secular education, "Shall we insist that secular learning cannot be well taught unless it is mixed with sacred?... Sacred matters are set apart; they are themselves alone; they are by divine appointment intrusted to appropriate keeping" of religious teachers and office-bearers in the church. Cited in George B. Cheeves, Right of the Bible in Our Public Schools (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1854), pp. 236-239.

¹Cited in Hodge, "The Education Question", BRPR (July, 1854), p. 533.

²Ibid., p. 534.

³Ibid., p. 531.

Hodge showed his doctrinal intolerance when he denounced those who supported religious instruction in state schools which was based on "general Christianity" or "those doctrines common to all who call themselves Christians." This "is far below what the Church is bound to require." Because "there is no rational hope of seeing our public schools,...elevated even to that defective standard," therefore a church must in obedience to God's command and conscience maintain parochial schools where students may be indoctrinated with the Westminster Catechism as well as the Bible.¹ In 1846, Hodge insinuated that no Presbyterian parent would want to send his child to a school or college which had no Reformed Confessional instruction.²

The Board of Education's lengthy report on Presbyterian parochial schools was made and adopted at the 1846 General Assembly, of which Hodge was moderator.³ The following year when the Board sought approval for the practical execution of establishing these church controlled schools, Hodge chaired the Committee examining the Report and preached a sermon on the subject, which the Southern Presbyterian Review reported as having been "heard by many with profound interest, and seemed to give additional impulse to the cause."⁴ Hodge later commented,

¹Ibid., pp. 536-540.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1846), pp. 438-439, 441.

³For this report and accompanying resolutions, see Baird, Collection, pp. 406-410.

⁴Thornwell, Writings of...Thornwell, Vol. IV, p. 497.

It is this, more than any thing else, that we have long regarded as the complement of our ecclesiastical organization. We venture to say that the next generation will wonder how the Presbyterian Church could have consented so long, to the unnatural divorce between teaching and preaching, we might say, between teaching our youth in the school-room, and our adult population in the church. We rejoice that the work is now in the vigorous hands of the Board of Education.¹

Hodge dismissed the objections that denominationally controlled schools would cost too much or that they would divide the American population into sects.

If the several denominations adopt the plan of parochial schools, the state will soon be forced to the obviously just method of a proportionate distribution of the public funds, whether derived from taxation or lands or a capital stock. A beginning has been made on this in New York, in favour of the Romanists, and what has been granted to them cannot long be withheld from others.²

In 1854, when some Presbyterian schools had been deprived of state funds, thereby causing financial strain on the Board, which itself was being attacked by those who preferred to support state schools, Hodge replied, "It is not right or reasonable to expect either the Church or Christian men to contribute for the support of institutions controlled by trustees appointed by State legislatures" who cannot "give due security for their religious influence." Establishing a curriculum, instructing youth, selecting teachers, and the final

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1847), p. 425. The General Assembly directed that every congregation should "establish within its bounds one or more primary schools, under the care of the session of the church, in which together with the usual branches of secular learning, the truths and duties of our holy religion shall be assiduously inculcated" and that the Board of Education "is authorized to expend whatever moneys are committed to them for that purpose." Ibid., pp. 425-426. Our underlining.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1846), p. 441.

disciplining of piety should be in the hands of a church council. Individual Christians should support their own church's schools, but as it is expedient that the Presbyterian Board of Education acts as the organ for the whole church in educational matters, they should also financially insure the Board's efforts to establish and maintain schools, academies and colleges, which will be under church supervision.¹ In answer to the second objection about isolating religious groups, Hodge casually said that schools would not do so anymore than having separate churches, pastors and church courts. Besides, "Methodists and Baptists will not refuse to educate their children at all rather than send to a school under the charge of Presbyterians."²

Although in 1869 Hodge denied that his views had ever "undergone any change on the education question",³ there is little doubt that the events which occurred between his 1854 Princeton Review article and the publication of his 1872 Systematic Theology caused Hodge to shift the emphasis of his polemics from defending parochial schools to demanding that state schools should teach the Christian religion.⁴ There were a number of reasons for this shift. First, too many Old School Presbyterians were ambivalent toward private church schools, so that the financial strain and shortage of teachers

¹Hodge, "The Education Question", BRPR (July, 1854), pp. 542-544.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1846), p. 441.

³Letter, "Dr. Hodge to Rev. Morris Sutphen, D.D." LCH, p. 410.

⁴In ST, III, pp. 353-356, which is on religious education, there is no mention of parochial schools.

weakened the caliber of the Presbyterian parochial system. Second, the New School which reunited with the Old School in 1869 was doctrinally less rigid and had favored public schools all along. The 1870 General Assembly threw their complete support behind the "Free Public School" as an "essential part of our Republican system" and "connected with all the best interests of Christian society in the United States." They were "entirely opposed to the appropriation of any portion of the public-school funds for the support of sectarian institutions,...(which are) with the greatest mischief, not only to the cause of popular education, but hardly less to the interests of American freedom, unity, and progress." They called upon their "Roman Catholic fellow-citizens...to coöperate with us in sustaining our American Common School system...."¹ This stand reflects how Presbyterians, as well as most Protestants, had come to associate parochial schools with the Roman Catholic Church. At the time and even more so later, they literally feared that the enormous increase in Catholics, coupled with their militant demand for state funds for more parochial schools, would destroy the public school system and possibly the American democracy.²

¹Minutes of General Assembly, Vol. 1870-1871, pp. 49-52.

²Actually, xenophobia in general and the organization of the extreme Protestant nativists, such as the American Protestant Association (founded in 1842) and the Know-Nothing Party (1854), and the fanatical newspaper, The Protestant (1830), had aggravated Protestant-Catholic tension for years. In 1854, Philip Schaff reported to some Berlin friends, "Great political difficulties may arise, especially from the growth of the Roman church, which has been latterly aiming everywhere at political influence, and thus rousing the jealousy and opposition of the great Protestant majority. The Puritanic Americans see in Catholicism an ecclesiastical despotism, from which they fear also political despotism, so that its sway in

It appears that Hodge began noticing as early as 1860 the general disenchantment of Presbyterians with the practice of forcing their peculiar doctrines on the curriculum of religious education. In his sermon at the death of Dr. Van Rensselaer, Secretary of the Old School's Board of Education, Hodge admitted, "Much as true Christians may appear to differ in their theology, they all agree in their religion, and their religion is only the subjective effect of the same glorious truths objectively revealed in the Word."¹ From then on, we see Hodge emphasizing even more the church's duty to declare and enforce the law of God. It will become clear in the following sections that he used this power as the premise of his argument to demand of state education the inclusion of religious instruction with the Protestant Bible. He then assumed that anyone who read the Bible with an open and rational mind would automatically embrace the Presbyterian doctrinal truths and be morally elevated.

Declaring and Enjoining the Moral Law

At the 1859 General Assembly, Thornwell succeeded in tabling a

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the United States must be the death of Republican freedom. Thus the Catholic question has already come to be regarded by many as at the same time a political question, involving the existence of the Republic; and a religious war between Catholics and Protestants, though in the highest degree improbable, is still by no means an absolute impossibility;..." Philip Schaff, America: A Sketch of Its Political, Social, and Religious Character (Originally published in 1855), ed. by Perry Miller (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 77.

¹Cited in Lewis J. Sherrill, Presbyterian Parochial Schools, 1846-1870 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1932), pp. 187-188.

motion which recommended that the Old School Presbyterians support the American Colonization Society. In his argument, he advocated that

the Church is exclusively a spiritual organization, and possesses none but spiritual power. It is her mission to promote the glory of God and the salvation of men from the curse of the law. She has nothing to do with the voluntary associations of men for various civil and social purposes, that are outside of her pale....It is the great aim of the Church to deliver men from sin and death and hell. She has no mission to care for things, and to become entangled with the kingdoms and the policy, of this world....No man will say that Jesus Christ has given to His ministry a commission to attend to the colonization of races, or to the arrest of the slave-trade, or to the mere physical comforts of man. It is not the business of the Church to build asylums for the insane and the blind. The Church deals with men as men, as fallen sinners standing in the need of salvation; not as citizens of the Commonwealth, or philanthropists, or members of society....The Church has no right, no authority, to league herself with any of the institutions of the State, or such as have for their object mere secular enterprises.... The moral power of opinion is not the kind of power which the Church exercises. Here is the spiritual power of the Word of God.¹

Hodge said that Thornwell's theory of a church's spiritual power was too ambiguous.

If by spiritual, be meant what relates to the spirit, in the sense of the moral and religious nature of man, then it is true that the church is restricted in her action to what is purely spiritual. But if the word be so restricted as to confine it to what pertains exclusively to the religious element of our nature, to what concerns the method of salvation, as distinguished from the law² of God, then the above principle is most obviously false.

¹Thornwell, Writings of...Thornwell, Vol. IV, pp. 472f.

²Hodge, "The Princeton Review on the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), p. 645. For a discussion of the extent to which Southern Presbyterians of Thornwell's day committed themselves and their succeeding generations to a doctrine of the church divorced from social and moral witness and action, see Ernest Trice Thompson, The Spirituality of the Church: A Distinctive Doctrine of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1961).

Thus for Hodge, the people, besides having the one power to teach the Gospel or plan of salvation, must also have the power to testify to the moral government of God and enjoin its demands not only upon its own members but also upon every creature and community.

Reviewing Thornwell's 1859 speech, Hodge argued that to the church society "is committed not merely the work of public worship and exercising discipline, not simply or exclusively to exhort men to repentance and faith, but to assert, maintain, and propagate the truth" about the relative duties of parents and children, of magistrates and people, of masters and slaves, etc. If there are any infractions of these moral laws by the people or rulers, then it "is as much obligatory on the church, in her aggregate capacity, as on her individual pastors", to press with long-suffering upon the consciences of particular persons in particular cases their moral obligations.¹ From what we have seen of Hodge's epistemology and principles of ethics, this can only mean that a church has the right to remind everyone of their innate moral nature and responsibilities by using the moral standards divinely and judicially pronounced in the Bible.

It is most interesting to observe how Hodge applied this to the American scene. Recalling the earlier exposition of Hodge's concept of the nature of the State, we must remember that civil government is ordained by God and that its form is determined by the providence of God and the will of the people.² First, saying that

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), pp. 615-617.

²See our pp. 170f, 179f.

"every man had equal rights" with his fellow American citizen, Hodge wrote that he conceded

that in the United States no form of religion can be established;....that no preference can be given to the members of one religious denomination above those of another. That no man can be forced to contribute to the support of any church or of any religious institution. That every man is at liberty to regulate his conduct and life according to his convictions or conscience, provided he does not violate the law of the land.¹

But then Hodge went on to circumvent this national policy of religious liberty by building upon the rational demands of the self-evident moral law an argument that America, her law, institutions, character and religion were Christian and Protestant. In brief, his logic was as follows:² Although he said that a nation is not a "mere conglomeration of individuals", but "an organized body", he thought, as most citizens did, that the sum of individuals' minds and wills formed America. This meant that the State should act rationally and could not possibly act "as though there were no distinction between right and wrong." Also it is a fact that all men are "religious beings". "It is no matter what they may say, or may pretend to think, the law which binds them to allegiance to God, is just as inexorable as the law of gravitation." Therefore, the State would be "tyrannical" if its laws violated the "religious convictions of its citizens." "If a man goes to China, he expects to find the government administered according to the religion of the country. If he goes to Turkey, he expects to find the Koran supreme

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 341.

²Unless otherwise stated, these points come from ST, III, pp. 341-360.

and regulating all public action." This is in virtue of "a universal and necessary law." "If you plant an acorn, you get an oak." If Protestant Christians take possession of and settle in a country, the nation they constitute must be Protestant and Christian, which is the "fact of the United States." This means "that the organic life, the institutions, laws, and official action of the government, whether that action be legislative, judicial, or executive, is, and of right should be, and in fact must be, in accordance with the principles of Protestant Christianity", which was and is the religious and moral conviction of the majority of the American people.

In effect, Hodge was setting out what had been his lifetime belief that the United States had an "established religion", that it should act upon the "principle of toleration" toward non-Protestants and that it could only continue to exist if it guaranteed the Protestant interpretation of universal moral laws or "free rights".¹ This evidently is why he readily supported the movement to secure an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would make the Christian religion and morals the "undeniable legal basis" for the "fundamental law of the land."² It could be suggested that men like Hodge, who

¹Hodge, "Sunday Mails", BRPR (No.1, 1831), pp. 130-134; "The Education Question", BRPR (July, 1854), pp. 519-529; "Sunday Laws", BRPR (October, 1859), pp. 757-767.

²Stokes, Church and State, Vol. III, pp. 583f; LCH, p. 411. "The National Association to Secure the Religious Amendment to the Constitution of the United States", which was formed in 1864, proposed to Congress the following revision to the Preamble. "We the people of the United States, humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus as the Ruler among the nations, and His revealed will as the supreme law of the land,

thought America was by divine command a Protestant nation and that Protestant churches had a right to force Protestant morality and belief upon the body politic, were doing exactly what they had criticized Roman Catholics of doing - using an indirect power over the State.¹ This certainly seemed to be the case when Hodge approached such civil laws on the Sabbath, marriage and education. He simply assumed that since America was Protestant and Christian, it was inexcusable and tyrannical if the civil government or any citizen broke these respective Biblical, moral laws, and if this happened, the people of a church had the duty to remind the State and community of their moral obligation to retain their divinely constituted nature. If such testimony was ignored, liberty would be lost and the country destroyed.

Observing the Sabbath is one of those permanent and universal laws, Hodge argued, that if men forsake it, "then will God forsake... as He did France....If any community desires the preservation of order and virtue...let it insist...that the Sabbath shall not be

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in order to constitute a Christian government and, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the inalienable rights and the blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to ourselves, our posterity, and all the people, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

¹See our p.174f. Professor Littell argues that in the United States, the concept of the "wall of separation" between church and state and "religious liberty", are "false myths" and have never existed. Franklin H. Littell, From State Church to Pluralism: A Protestant Interpretation of Religion in American History (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1962), pp. 98-100.

profaned by worldly employments or recreations." If Sunday laws should be abolished and government, businesses, and institutions operated on that sacred day, as on the other days of the week, then "Christians could not hold office", would forfeit "their citizenship", and would "lose their piety and religion." Consequently "society would sink into utter degradation"... and "Christianity would soon disappear."¹

In concluding his polemic on the Sabbath, Hodge wrote,

The indispensable condition of social order is either despotic power in the magistrate, or good morals among the people. Morality without religion is impossible; religion cannot exist without knowledge; knowledge cannot be disseminated among the people, unless there be a class of teachers, and time allotted for their instruction. Christ has made all his ministers, teachers; He has commanded them to teach all nations; He has appointed one day in seven to be set apart for such instruction. It is a historical fact that since the introduction of Christianity, nine tenths of the people have derived the greater part of their religious knowledge from the services of the sanctuary. If the Sabbath, therefore, be abolished, the fountain of life for the people will be sealed.²

Hodge noted the numerous civil and religious laws on marriage and divorce that were inconsistent with the "common" interpretation of the Biblical laws, and then pronounced them immoral. The duties of the church society are twofold; first, to disregard the conflicting state laws, and second, to arouse and guide public opinion toward their repeal.³

¹Hodge, How Is The Sabbath To Be Sanctified? pp. 3, 8, 10-12; "Sunday Laws", BRPR (October, 1859), p. 754.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 347.

³Ibid., pp. 368-421, especially pp. 404-406.

Returning to the education question, we see Hodge's use of the premise of moral law (which all churches are to enforce) to demand the inclusion of religious instruction in state schools. It can be understood why in 1854, he argued,

If the design of the State is the promotion of the public good; if religious education is necessary for the attainment of that object, and if such education cannot in a multitude of cases be secured otherwise than by State intervention, then we must either admit that the State is bound to provide for the religious education of its members, or assume the absurd position, that the State is not bound to answer the very end of its existence....Let State officers and legislatures, instead of bending all their influence to make public instruction as little religious as possible, endeavour to render it as thoroughly Christian and Protestant as they can. Instead of vainly striving to make the schools acceptable to sceptics and Papists, let them strive to make them what they ought to be - and the people will rise up and call them blessed. Let thoroughly religious and Protestant books be provided for the libraries; let the Bible be made an indispensable text-book in every school; let some approved catechism be taught to every child, and let every care be taken to have the teachers not only competent, but religious.¹

In 1872 he emphasized even more the "facts" of man's nature and their corresponding "rights" of having Christian public schools. But rather than calling upon the church societies, he pointed out that individual Christians in America as the "Church in the United States", have a right to demand and enjoin upon the State that "education in all its departments should be religiously conducted." "If you banish Christianity from schools, you thereby render them infidel. If a child is brought up in the ignorance of God, he becomes an atheist. If never taught the moral law, his moral nature is as underdeveloped as that of a pagan." Therefore, any unjust law

¹Hodge, "The Education Question", BRPR (July, 1854), pp. 519, 529.

which banishes religious instruction from schools, bringing destruction upon the State, "ought not to be submitted to."¹

With this heightened sense of protecting the piety of individual Christians and preserving the Protestant morality of American society, it is obvious why Hodge responded to Thornwell's limitation of a church's spiritual power to that of teaching the Gospel by saying:

She has nothing to do as a church with secular affairs, with questions of politics or state policy. Her duty is to announce and enforce by moral means the law of God. If at any time, as may well happen, a given question assumes both a moral and political bearing, as for example, the slave-trade, then the duty of the church is limited to setting forth the law of God on the subject. It is not her office to argue the question in its bearing on the civil or secular interests of the community, but simply to declare in her official capacity what God has said on the subject. To adopt any theory which would stop the mouth of the church, and prevent her bearing her testimony to kings and rulers, magistrates and people, in behalf of the truth and law of God, is like administering chloroform to a man to prevent his doing mischief.²

To conclude this aspect of a people's power of teaching, we should observe the qualification Hodge alludes to above. That is, a church society should not declare a position on any purely political issue. The two major disputed issues of Hodge's day involving moral and political questions were slavery and the Civil War (patriotism, secession, war, etc.). We have already noted his basic stand on slavery.³ In 1865, Hodge declared, "With regard to slavery, both as to its moral and political aspect, we stand now just

¹Hodge, ST, III, pp. 353-356.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), p. 617.

³See our pp. 245f.

where we always stood."¹ However, the fact of the matter is that his over-reliance upon empirical natural law, tempered by the development of the American slave problems, led him to shift the emphasis and proportion of his writings from the defense of slaveholding, as un sinful in itself, to calling forth a church's responsibility of repealing unjust slave laws incongruent with the innate morality of the civil society.

In the early years, Hodge had argued that because slavery as an institution is not sinful, but a civil matter for individual direction, a church should not condemn it but merely discipline its slave-holding members for impious acts. In 1844, he wrote,

It is plain that the church has no responsibility and no right to interfere with respect to the slave laws of the South. Those laws are doubtless in many cases unjust and cruel, enjoining what God forbids, and forbidding what God enjoins. The existence of those laws supposes criminality somewhere; but the responsibility rests on those who made, and have the power to repeal them. It does not rest on the church. Christians who are members of communities in which such laws are in force, have their share of responsibility with regard to them, as citizens. - but it is no part of the vocation of the church, as such, to interfere with civil laws. The apostles did not call a synod at Jerusalem, to denounce the Roman laws, but they laid the foundation of a spiritual society, and let the world make its own laws. We would not brook the legislatures of our States passing denunciatory resolutions against our rules of church discipline; and we should not call upon the church to meddle with the laws of the land. As citizens we have the right and duty to demand just and equal laws; but as a church, we have other and higher duties.²

In 1859 and the years following Hodge was still saying that a church could not teach that all slavery was sinful and should not discipline or exclude slave-holding members as such. But he claimed

¹Hodge, "The Princeton Review and the State of the Country and the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), p. 687.

²Hodge, "Abolitionism", BRPR (October, 1844), p. 580.

the right of a church to use every moral means to speak out against unjust state slave laws and to seek their immediate repeal.¹ The possible reason for this shift could be: 1) That in 1836, when Hodge's first article on slavery appeared due to church politics, there was an understood alliance between Northern and Southern Old School Presbyterians on keeping clear of the slave issue.²

2) Confined to a Northern perspective, Hodge was at first naive about the extent of suffering and evil which the Southern slave system was producing. 3) The militant abolitionists offended his calm, rational approach to moral problems and threatened the unity of the Old School denomination.³ However, toward the late 1850's Hodge became more aware of the unjust situation of most slaves, and many of his own close associates had been persuaded to attack its roots.⁴ Another reason was that Hodge found himself having to attack the Southern churchmen who were claiming that the Bible sanctioned the slave system, that it was given by providential trust to the Southerners "to conserve and to perpetuate the institution of

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), pp. 616-617; "The Princeton Review on the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), pp. 639, 643, 645.

²See our pp. 349-350.

³The 1845 and 1849 General Assemblies passed what could almost be called a gag rule, which prevented the abolitionists from introducing anti-slavery memorials that would have offended the South and ruptured the church. Cf. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 437-441; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1849), p. 449.

⁴A.A. Hodge held pastorates in the slave states of Maryland and Virginia from May, 1850 until July, 1861 and could possibly have given his father more convincing information. Also Harriet Beecher Stowe's "nation shaking" Uncle Tom's Cabin was published in 1852.

domestic slavery," and that the church should not be concerned with abolishing what is solely a civil institution.¹ The slave issue became so intense that Hodge finally admitted, "Either our national life or slavery must be extinguished."²

Surrounding the Civil War was the very complex moral-political question of obedience to the State. Throughout the hysteria of the times, Hodge claimed that he consistently held, "As the Bible commands obedience to the powers that be, it is clearly within the

¹Thornwell, Writings of...Thornwell, Vol. IV, pp. 385f, 455-464. This latter reference is a portion of the "Address To All Churches of Christ", written by Thornwell and adopted by the first Presbyterian General Assembly of the Confederate States on December 4, 1861 as their official view of slavery. See excerpts of Benjamin M. Palmer's (the first moderator of the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly) 1860 Sermon, preached in the First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, on "The South: Her Peril and Her Duty", cited in Smith, Handy, Loetscher, American Christianity, Vol. II, p. 178 and Palmer, Slavery A Divine Trust: The Duty of the South to Preserve and Perpetuate It. (New Orleans, La., 1860. Cf. Hodge, "Emancipation", BRPR October, 1849), p. 602; "The Princeton Review on the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), p. 647. It is interesting to note that Hodge's earlier writings contributed to the Southern defense of slavery. One critic said, "Probably no other man did so much as he (Hodge) to produce the conviction that American slavery was not sinful....leading his church to a false ethical attitude." "Death of Charles Hodge", The Evangelical Repository and United Presbyterian Worker, Vol. LV (1878), p. 124. Several of his articles were published separately and were frequently distributed widely throughout the South. Two appeared in the highly influential pro-slavery book, E.N. Elliott, Ed., Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments (Augusta, Georgia, 1860), pp. 811-840, 841-877, which also included political, social and economic sanctions for slavery. The economic issue was undoubtedly the key factor for the South's defensive attitude. With Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin (1793) and the growing world market for cotton, the Southern farmers became increasingly dependent upon slaves to pick their money crop. By 1860 57% of the nation's exports was cotton and three million of the four million slaves were used in its production, which concentrated in the Deep South.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1864), p. 550.

province of the church to enjoin on all her members obedience, allegiance, and loyalty."¹ This aspect of moral teaching was founded upon civil government being a "divine institution" which the people are obligated to sustain.² This meant that "obedience is due to every de facto government, whatever its origin or character."³ Following this, argued Hodge, a church society has no responsibility in judging or teaching what political form this government should be. In the case of the United States, whether or not a person owes his ultimate civil allegiance to his particular state government or to the national government is purely a political question. However, once the question had been decided by political circumstances (civil courts, war, military occupation, or majority opinion of the citizens), then it is in a church's power to teach the community in which it resides, and especially to enforce upon its own members the religious duty of moral obedience to the existing government and civil laws.

There were four controversial times in which Hodge applied this principle of teaching obedience to the State. These are worthy of a brief sketch because they point out how his opponents readily used aspects of his moral rationalizations to support their own partisan stands. 1. In November, 1860, before the secession of southern slave states had actually begun (South Carolina, in

¹Hodge, "The Princeton Review on the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), p. 643.

²See our pp.170f.

³Hodge, ST, III, p. 358.

December, 1860, was the first to secede), Hodge wrote the article, "The State of the Country", for the January, 1861 issue of the Princeton Review. Fearing the disunion of the nation, he began by saying:

There are periods in the history of every nation when its destiny for ages may be determined by the events of an hour. There are occasions when political questions rise into the sphere of morals and religion; when the rule for political action is to be sought, not in considerations of state policy, but in the law of God. On such occasions the distinction between secular and religious journals is obliterated. When the question to be decided turns on moral principles, when reason, conscience, and religious sentiment are to be addressed, it is the privilege and duty of all who have access in any way to the public ear, to endeavour to allay unholy feeling, and to bring truth to bear on the minds of their fellow-citizens.¹

Hodge then proceeded to advocate that the United States in effect had, by divine providence, been made one nation and not a confederacy of independent states. He believed that all intelligent Christians disavowed immediate abolition of slavery. Because this was the true sentiment of the North or of the national government, Southerners had no justifiable ground for revolution or disruption of the Union.² Therefore, the right of secession does not exist under these circumstances, and if exercised would lead to war and be both morally wrong and a heinous crime. The editorial response to this article

¹Hodge, "The State of the Country", BRPR (January, 1861), p.1. Our underlining.

²Hodge, however, admitted that the anti-slavery activities of a thousand "fanatics" were great crimes and "would justify almost any available means of redress." Ibid., p. 15. Hodge seemed to be unaware of the extensive progress being made by abolitionists.

was immediate and widespread.¹ It was bitterly condemned by both the abolitionists and Southern Presbyterians, the latter of whom greatly surprised Hodge.² But the article was not only approved by the majority of the Northern Old School Presbyterians, but it also converted many to strong anti-secession sentiments and deepened the pro-Federalist convictions of others.

2. This spirit pervaded the already tense 1861 General Assembly convening in Philadelphia on May 16th. South Carolina had fired on Fort Sumter on April 12th, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers on April 15th, and nine states had already seceded. Only 16 commissioners from the Confederate States were present at the General Assembly.

¹Besides being reproduced in many other religious papers, the article was reprinted as the pamphlet, The State of the Country (New York, 1861), and distributed by the thousands throughout the country and abroad. Hodge later admitted that due to "the spirit of the times", no other article he had ever written "excited greater attention." "The Princeton Review on the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), p. 629.

²Some of these caustic criticisms are cited by Hodge in his "The Church and the Country", BRPR (April, 1861), pp. 328f. Both Hodge's reply (which was never published) to Southern Presbyterian Review (LCH, pp. 462-463) and his reply, "A Communication from Rev. Charles Hodge, D.D.", The Central Presbyterian, January 19, 1861 (an Old School newspaper, published weekly in Richmond, Virginia) assert that his intentions in "State of the Country" were to convince the South that the North were by-and-large anti-abolitionists. In a series of articles responding to Hodge, William Brown, Editor of the Central Presbyterian, displayed the typical Southern Presbyterian defense of slavery and right of secession, using a remarkably similar logic based also on moral law, but from an anti-Republican political perspective. "The Princeton Review: Rev. Charles Hodge, D.D.", January 26, 1861; February 23, 1861; March 2, 1861; March 9, 1861; and March 16, 1861, Central Presbyterian. The fact that most of the South labeled Hodge as their enemy, because of his support of Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party, is evidenced most vividly in William J. Grayson, Reply to Prof. Hodge on the "State of the Country" (Charleston, South Carolina: Evans & Cogswell, 1861), Cf. LCH, p. 453.

The majority of the presbyteries had refused to send any because they identified the Assembly with the Union which, as one Charleston minister said, "is to be obeyed at the peril of 'damnation'."¹ During the meeting of the Assembly, public and ecclesiastical pressures were applied to induce the adoption of Gardiner Spring's resolution to declare the Assembly's allegiance to the U.S. Constitution and its obligation to preserve and restore the Union. After many days of debate, it passed by a vote of 154 to 66. Hodge, as a member of this Assembly, took the leading role both in debating the resolution and in drawing up a "Protest", which was signed by 57 others. In essence, he argued that the Old School General Assembly could profess loyalty to the civil government but not allegiance to the Federal government, because 1) a church has no power to interpret the U.S. Constitution on the issue of state versus national authority. Members of the church in the seceding states could not declare their loyalty to the United States because it would be treasonable to their own state; thus the Spring Resolution forced them to choose between allegiance to their state and allegiance to the church. 2) This violated the church's constitution and previous actions by introducing a new term of ministerial and Christian communion. 3) The Resolution was unnecessary for the reason that "Old-school Presbyterians everywhere out of the so-called seceding States, have openly avowed and conspicuously displayed their allegiance to the (U.S.) Constitution

¹Cited in Ernest T. Thompson, Presbyterians In The South: Volume One: 1607-1861 (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 563.

and the Government, and that in many cases, at great cost and peril."¹ The best interests of the nation and the church would be secured without adopting the Spring Resolution, which might cause the church to act more and more with a "worldly or fanatical spirit", and which might expose Southern churches to destruction, thus endangering both the integrity and unity of the Old School Church.² It should be noted that the Assembly's answer to Hodge's "Protest" used Hodge's opening sentences of "The State of the Country" to vindicate the Assembly's right to decide a "political question" which had risen into the "sphere of morals and religion". However, Hodge answered that as important a moral necessity as it was to preserve the Union, such a moral obligation was, "so far as the church is concerned", "in its own nature indifferent", and therefore must be left to the individual's conscience. Hodge pointed out that,

a man who acts on the theory of secession, may be justly liable to the penalty of the civil law; he may be morally guilty in the sight of God; but he has committed no offence of which the church can take cognizance. We therefore are not inconsistent in asserting, 1. That secession is a ruinous political heresy. 2. That those who act on that doctrine, and throw off allegiance to the Constitution and the Union, are guilty of a great crime; and, 3. That nevertheless they are not amenable in this matter to the church. The question whether they are morally guilty, depends on the question whether their theory of the constitution is right. If it is right, they are heroes;

¹This exaggeration displays Hodge's sincere conviction of the common consciousness of individual Presbyterians.

²For the texts of 1. "The Spring Resolution", 2. Hodge's "Protest", 3. The General Assembly's answer to Hodge's Protest, and 4. Hodge's Comments on this answer, see Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1861), pp. 544-568.

if it is wrong, they are wicked rebels. But whether that theory is right or wrong, it is not the province of the church to decide.¹

3. The third stage in which Hodge applied his political-moral principle to the church's power of teaching obedience to the state came after the 1861 General Assembly when the war was in full progress and the Confederate Presbyterian Church had been formed. In 1862, the General Assembly passed R.J. Breckinridge's paper which, in addition to pledging allegiance to the United States Government, declared that all congregations in the Northern and Border states should aid the State in "crushing force with force."² Hodge thought that "the Christian course for the Assembly, would have been entire silence on the disturbed state of the country." Nevertheless, he

¹Ibid., pp. 561-562. Hodge had made virtually the same point earlier. "The Church and the Country", BRPR (April, 1861), p. 375f. It is noteworthy that when the Southern Presbyterians held their first General Assembly in December, 1861, they used as a pretense for forming a separate church, the passage of the Spring Resolution, which to them encroached upon the spirituality of the church, which to them must move in a "different orbit from the State." "Address to All Churches...", Writings of...Thornwell, Vol. IV, pp. 447-455. However, the truth of the matter is that the Southern churchmen did not want "to sit down in council with the enemies of their country seeking her utter ruin and overthrow." John B. Adger, "The General Assembly of 1861", Southern Presbyterian Review (July, 1861), p. 297. Their argument for complete separation of church and state seems to be an excuse, because, practically, they swore allegiance and supported the Confederacy in every church council. Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, 1861, p. 12; Thompson, Presbyterians In The South, pp. 569-571. Thornwell, who authored the "Address to All Churches", also submitted a memorial to the first Assembly, for them to petition the Congress of the Confederate States to acknowledge constitutionally Christianity as the new nation's religion. Writings of...Thornwell, Vol. IV, pp. 549-556.

²For the text of this paper, see Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1862), pp. 503-507.

acknowledged the Assembly's right to make such a declaration because all the Presbyterians whom the Assembly represented were unquestionably subjects of the U.S. Government and Constitution.¹ Hodge pointed out, "as the question of peace and war is, by the Constitution of the country, (which jure divino binds the conscience of every American citizen,) belongs to the Congress of the United States, every citizen is bound to submit to the decision of that body," and every church court is bound to sustain the war and enjoin such obedience.²

The war is justifiable, reasoned Hodge, because the South started the hostilities and were attempting to overthrow the nation in order to perpetuate slavery indefinitely. Both of these the nation is obligated to suppress. Hodge later wrote to a fellow-minister,

No government on earth could be sustained, if diversity of opinion on the measures of the Government authorized its citizens to side in feeling or in action with its enemies. However therefore we may differ from the Executive or Congress as to the wisdom or even the constitutionality, of some of the measures adopted, we are still bound to be loyal to our country and to its constitutional organs; to take part zealously and openly in sustaining the Government in its efforts to suppress the rebellion, and to pray earnestly for God's blessing on the national cause and heartily to thank him for every intervention of His providence in its behalf.³

¹Ibid., pp. 515-518. He had remarked on the floor of the 1861 General Assembly that if the Spring resolution had been presented in his own presbytery or at the Synod of New Jersey, he "would cordially support them", because there would have been no purely political question to decide. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1864), p. 563n.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1862), p. 520. Hodge's parenthesis.

³On Praying and Giving Thanks For Victories: A Correspondence Between Rev. J.M. MacDonald, and the Rev. Dr. Hodge (Princeton, New Jersey, 1864), p. 5. Hodge's letters to his brother during this period display the keen interest Hodge had in the military operations of the war. LCH, pp. 471f.

Throughout the Civil War, Hodge made attempts to build the confidence of Northern Christians "in the justice of the national cause" and assure them "that God is on our side."¹ When he felt that England was siding with the South, he was quick to point out the righteous cause of the Union which was to be "the instrument in his (God's) hand for the dissemination of Christianity and civil liberty throughout the world...."²

When the Breckinridge paper was adopted by the 1862 General Assembly, Dr. Samuel McPheeters of St. Louis had objected on the grounds that it violated the church's constitution, that the church should only declare her allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that it would imply the guilt of those who could not accept total civil allegiance to the state.³ McPheeters personally had pledged obedience to the Union, but he felt it necessary to be neutral about his feelings on the war when acting as pastor to his Border State congregation. Through a long involved series of events⁴ McPheeters was removed in 1863 from his pastoral charge by both

¹Hodge, "The War", BRPR (January, 1863), p. 168. This article also contained several appeals for the war to be conducted according to strict military law and Christian piety. It is interesting to note that Hodge here acknowledged the right of President Lincoln temporarily to suspend the writ of habeas corpus for the preservation of the Union. He also believed the President's emancipation of the slaves was a "military necessity" and not the object of the war. No one could "legally ordain the permanent abolition of slavery throughout the United States", because three million slaves could not overnight have the dignity of freemen. Ibid., pp. 155-167.

²Hodge, "England and America", BRPR (January, 1862), pp. 147-177.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1862), p. 510.

⁴For a detailed account of the McPheeters case, which attracted national attention and involved President Lincoln, see Lewis G. Vander Velde, The Presbyterian Churches and the Federal Union: 1861-1869 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), pp. 306-324.

state and ecclesiastical authorities for allegedly being disloyal to the Union. Hodge had questioned McPheeters' neutral position in the 1862 General Assembly. But he was in favor of re-instating McPheeters when his case came before the 1864 General Assembly because of the questionable ecclesiastical procedures that surrounded this case of a basically "good man and a faithful minister of Christ."¹ Nevertheless, Hodge thought McPheeters had "committed some very grave mistakes, which were the source of all his difficulties."² He first pointed out that McPheeters should not have limited the church society's Biblical testimony to that of the Gospel. The Bible gives the church "rules for pronouncing about slave-laws, the slave-trade, obedience to magistrates, treason, rebellion, and revolution. To shut her mouth on these questions (although they involve politics), is to make her unfaithful to her high vocation." One of the speakers on the floor of the Assembly had used part of Hodge's "Protest" of the 1861 Spring Resolution to defend McPheeters' principle of denying that the Church of Christ, as such, owes allegiance to any civil government. Second, McPheeters objected to the military authorities demanding allegiance to the U.S. Government of all who attended church meetings or councils because this made that oath a condition of membership in the church or church court. Hodge believed that this was carrying church independence too far because the military government was seeking a

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1864), pp. 566-574.

²Ibid., p. 561. The following points are taken from Ibid., pp. 562-566.

legitimate objective - public safety of the community.¹ Third, McPheeters' neutrality about the war was "more offensive and irritating than open hostility." In the fight against the South, "no man can be neutral. He might as well be neutral between God and Mammon, Christ and Belial." Besides, "the conviction of the people makes neutrality in the matter an impossibility." The pastor of a congregation, contended Hodge,

is the organ of the people in presenting their prayers and thanksgiving to God. They have the right to have their heart's desires for their country brought before his throne. If the pastor's principles or feelings prevent his doing this; if he cannot pray for the success of our arms, and for the suppression of the rebellion; if he cannot heartily thank God for the victories he may grant our armies, he cannot satisfy the just demands of the people. The want of agreement or congeniality may be such as to demand a separation. If those who are dissatisfied be the minority, they should withdraw; if the majority, the pastor should withdraw.²

The General Assembly had been controlled by passionate patriots since 1861, and the 1864 Assembly members took anything less than enthusiastic loyalty to the Union as treason. Hence, McPheeters was not re-instated as pastor of the St. Louis church even though

¹Some Northern Presbyterians who usually sided with Hodge on most issues protested against this oath of allegiance as being "inconsistent with the spiritual independence of the Church." The Presbyterian (of Philadelphia) reported: "We are somewhat surprised to find that the reviewer (Hodge) approves of the oath, or at least considers it not an infringement of the right of free assembly. We sympathize with those who believe that they could not enter a Presbytery, when the State stood with a drawn sword at the door, to judge the qualifications of the members. We do not believe that this is within the province of the State...." "The Princeton Review and the McPheeters Case", The Presbyterian, August 4, 1864.

²Ibid., p. 566.

Hodge and others thought that his neutral principles could not be condemned if he had personally fulfilled his moral obligation by taking "a stringent oath of allegiance to the Government."

4. Maddened by the recent assassination of President Lincoln, the 1865 General Assembly meeting in Pittsburgh passed a strong set of rules branding secession as an ecclesiastical crime, and calling all who in any way compromised with the South sinners who had openly to repent and confess their immorality before they could be re-admitted to Christian or ministerial communion in the Old School Presbyterian Church. Hodge protested strongly that although the conduct of Southern ministers and members had been "exceeding wrong" and even at times "great sins in the sight of God", they should not be subject to "formal church discipline", for they had committed no ecclesiastical offense.¹ Using the same argument as he had in 1861, Hodge said that Southerners were morally bound to obey their de facto government no matter how wicked the rebellion had been. All the Church can require of them is a credible profession of faith and promise of obedience to the United States before re-admitting them to their communion. If a church court required anything else, it would not only be making a new term of communion, but would be demanding more "than the government which it desires to support."² Although Hodge believed that the church should be patriotic, he felt that it should not be partisan. He was "persuaded that not a

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1865), p. 511. What later became known as the "Pittsburgh Orders" are in Ibid., pp. 496f.

²Ibid., p. 513.

member of the body, when he comes calmly to consider the matter, will hesitate to admit that the Assembly...transcended its power" by passing such orders.¹

However, among the Border States of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland were many Old School Presbyterians who either had been secretly sympathetic to the South or had taken the neutral ground like McPheeters. In September of 1865, Louisville Presbytery led a bitter attack on not only the zealous Pittsburgh orders, but the whole Church-State policies of the Assemblies since 1861. They drew up a "Declaration and Testimony", which began by quoting Hodge's 1861 "Protest" to the Spring Resolution to substantiate their claim that the Church should not "determine matters of a partisan political character." Then they proceeded to testify against the numerous incidents in which they thought the Church had allied itself with the State. After deciding not to support the Church, its Boards or its councils unless the Church returned to its primary spiritual vocation, they called for a convention of all churchmen to expedite the Church's reformation.²

By the meeting of the 1866 General Assembly, 41 ministers and 78 elders of various Border State presbyteries had signed the

¹Ibid., p. 508.

²The text of the Declaration and Testimony Against the Erroneous and Heretical Doctrines and Practices Which Have Obtained and Been Propagated in the Presbyterian Church in the United States During the Past Five Years. 1865 is contained in the Presbyterian Historical Almanac (Philadelphia: 1867), Vol. 9, pp. 69-78.

"Declaration and Testimony". Hodge admitted that some of the points cited in the document were valid. But, he added, it wrongly assumed that the nature and functions of the church were so spiritual that a church could not testify and enforce the moral laws.¹ The General Assembly refused to seat any commissioners who had signed the "Declaration and Testimony", dissolved Louisville Presbytery and threatened to dissolve any Presbytery which admitted to its membership any one who signed the document.² Hodge defended the right and power of the General Assembly to take these actions but thought them severe. Nevertheless, the teaching of the General Assembly in this case is final, although not absolute. Individuals can protest, but they must not do so to disunite the church society, for this would be schismatical. The signers of the "Declaration and Testimony", argued Hodge, had no just cause for separating from the church because the Assembly's teachings on the moral duty to obey the State and civil laws, although over-zealous at times, were legitimate deductions from the Biblical moral law and within the constitutional limits of the church's power.³

A.A. Hodge pointed out that the "high-handed action of the repression" of the "Declaration and Testimony" men by the General Assemblies of 1866 and 1867, "took off from the Northern Presbyterian Church the

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), p. 431.

²Most of the discussion and papers present at the Assembly on this controversy are contained in Ibid., pp. 433-480.

³Ibid., pp. 484-493, 431.

majority of the Presbyterians of the Border States, and they constitute the principal grievance in the sight of the members of the Southern Presbyterian Church which perpetuates and threatens to perpetuate indefinitely the unseemly divisions and jealousies, which so many good men have earnestly yet ineffectually labored to allay.¹

Besides the extreme nationalism and sectionalism which split the Old School Church before and after the Civil War, it seems that Hodge's moral reasoning furnished much support for their unreconcilable positions. From each stage in which he applied his political-moral principle on obedience to the State, churchmen could easily appeal to one or more points to construct their own partisan view of the church's power and province of teaching. Hodge might have avoided this misuse of his ethical arguments if he had not treated the people's power to teach the moral law as a category separate from their power to teach the Gospel.

Power of Serving Tables

This power of the people seems undeveloped by Hodge in comparison to the former three. However, we recall that he spoke of the spiritual sympathy true Christians have toward each other.² It followed that individual, professed Christians in a church society should have mutual love for one another. Each has the power to enhance his piety and manifest his love when he bears the burdens or supplies the needs of another member. He should recognize "the fact that what he possesses is not exclusively his own, but is a trust committed to him by God for the common benefit of his

¹LCH, p. 493.

²See our pp. 54, 58f.

fellow Christians."¹ In terms of a church society, Hodge saw this to mean that the people have the duty and power to collect and to distribute alms for the sick and poor.² However, argued Hodge, because Christianity is "not agrarianism", it "enjoins no community of goods", and does not violate "the laws of our nature". The exercise of a church's power to serve tables must be regulated by two "great principles". "First, if man will not work, neither shall he eat; and second, those who cannot work should be comfortably supported by those who can."³

Although Hodge was not completely a product of the "laissez-faire" economic system of his time, he did have a high regard for the individual's right of property and his accumulation and moral use of it. Only by understanding these views can we see his regulating principles mentioned above. First, the right of property "is not founded on the law of the land, or on any explicit or implied contract among men; but upon the law of nature."⁴ Hodge said that this meant,

(1.) That God has so constituted man that he desires and needs this right of the exclusive possession and use of certain things. (2.) Having made man a social being, He has made the right of property essential to the healthful development of human society. (3.) He has implanted a sense of justice in the nature of man, which condemns as morally wrong everything inconsistent with the right in question. (4.) He has declared in his Word that any and every violation of this right is sinful.

¹Hodge, "The Unity of the Church", MS H6624u at P.T.S.

²Hodge, "The Church of God", "Sermons", MS A1.Alc. at P.T.S.

³Ibid.; Hodge, "The Unity of the Church", MS H6624u at P.T.S.

⁴Hodge, ST, III, p. 426.

This doctrine of the divine right of property is the only security for the individual or for society. If it be made to rest on any other foundation, it is insecure and unstable. It is only by making property sacred, guarded by the fiery sword of divine justice, that it can be safe from the dangers to which it is everywhere and always exposed.¹

Although Hodge went on to expound the immorality of theft and fraud, what interests us is how he eliminated the early Jerusalem Christians' practice of holding all things in common. Because they were true Christians, they had a "lively sense of brotherhood" which produced a "corresponding degree of liberality". But, as Christians "who had but little of the Spirit of Christ" joined their number, it became "destructive" to act towards "nominal as towards real Christians". Because of this, the "community of goods" ceased and is not an obligation upon a church society today. "The fundamental error of modern systems of communism," argued Hodge, is that "they proceed on the false assumption that men are not depraved", but are "disinterested, faithful, laborious."² This, he thought, allowed "the idlest and least efficient member of society,... (to) receive as much as the most industrial and useful." Hence there is a denial of man's property of labor.³ There could be no community of property on earth, reasoned Hodge, because:

It supposes something near perfection in all embraced within the compass of its operation. It supposes that men will labour as assiduously without the stimulus of the desire to improve their condition and to secure the welfare of their

¹Ibid., p. 421.

²Hodge, "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), p. 363. Cf. ST, III, pp. 428f.

³Hodge, ST, III, pp. 431-432.

families as with it. It supposes absolute disinterestedness on the part of the more wealthy, the stronger, or the more able members of the community. They must be willing to forego all personal advantages from their superior endowments. It supposes perfect integrity on the part of the distributors of the common fund, and a spirit of moderation and contentment in each member of the community, to be satisfied with what others, and not he, may think to be his equitable share. We shall have to wait till the millennium before these conditions can be fulfilled. The attempt to introduce a general community of goods in the present state of the world, instead of elevating the poor, would reduce the whole mass of society to a common level of barbarism and poverty. The only secure basis of society is in those immutable principles of right and duty which God has¹ revealed in his Word, and written upon the hearts of men.

It seemed that Hodge believed that the Bible spoke of the perpetual existence of two classes in society, the holders of property and the poor, and prescribed respective duties for each.² He also thought that man's innate sense of justice would prevent the misuse of property (wealth), and that America's atmosphere of free enterprise made it possible for all men to better themselves if they were willing to work. In fact, most people of this period thought that poverty in America was the result of individual failure which itself was the consequence of sloth, stupidity, thriftlessness or immorality. They would admit that sometimes poverty was due to a regrettable misfortune, but its cure lay with the individual, not the state nor the church.³ As men accumulated wealth, they would give more liberally to the poor, especially if they practiced

¹Ibid., pp. 429-430.

²Ibid., p. 434; "Preaching the Gospel to the Poor", BRPR (January, 1871), p. 94.

³Cf. Ralph H. Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought: An Intellectual History Since 1815 (New York: The Ronald Press Company 1840), p. 10.

Christian piety. It was a church's duty, on the one hand, to teach the sacred right of property and to encourage individual members to be more industrious, and, on the other hand, to solicit voluntary contributions for their members who were unable to work (i.e., the sick or disabled).

However the emphasis of Hodge's sense of church responsibility to the poor outside the denomination fell on financing the preaching of the Gospel to the poor.¹ Hodge preached that worldly relief was important, but at best could only temporarily comfort the poor and offer them "forgetfulness or distraction". But preaching the truths of the Bible will raise their morality and offer them salvation. The Gospel gives the poor "rest" by showing them 1) that "God does not afflict his people willingly, but that their sufferings are designed for...their being 'purified as gold'"; 2) that their "afflictions give them the opportunity of glorifying God"; 3) that "their present afflictions are small compared to the eternal glory that shall be revealed to them" and 4) that "it sends the Holy Spirit as the divine Comforter."² The poor will be turned away from unnatural and atheistic communism if their minds are imbued with these truths.

Hodge felt it beyond the power of a church to have a ministry aimed at altering the socio-economic structure which was causing the misery and injustices of the poor masses. Not only was this abhorrent

¹See our pp. 258f.

²Hodge, No. 30, "Sermons, New Series, 1-47", MS H6624sf at P.T.S.

to his conservative economic instincts, but it was solely a temporal matter for the secular society.¹ A church "has nothing to do with the state, in the exercise of its discretion within its own sphere; and therefore has no right to meddle with questions of policy, foreign or domestic. She has nothing to do with tariffs, or banks, or internal improvements."²

In short, the people's power to serve tables was their power to harvest the liberality of their pious, rich members, to distribute these voluntary contributions to their own disabled members, widows, or orphans, and to spend the rest of the funds supporting the denomination's Boards, schools, etc.

We have seen in this chapter Hodge's first principle for Presbyterianism. Building up from the individual professing Christian's divinely prescribed duties, inherent powers and right of exercising these powers through his representative elder, Hodge has described a large part of what he thinks should be the nature and mission of an organized church society, which enhances the Christian's faith and piety. However, it must be remembered that although these powers belong in sensu primo to the people, they also belong to the clergy. Ministers normally exercise these powers jointly with the elders, but they can also exercise them alone. We now turn to see Hodge's concept of the office and function of the Presbyterian minister.

¹Hodge, ST, III, pp. 433-434.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1859), p. 615.

Chapter V Ministerial Office in the Church Society

"Presbyters, who minister in word and doctrine, are the highest permanent officers of the₁ church, and all belong to the same order"¹

The purpose of this chapter is to expound Hodge's doctrine of the ministry, especially as related to his Presbyterian Church. But first we must remember that, for Hodge, the ministry is not absolutely essential to the being of the true Church² or of any portion of the visible Church catholic. He made this clear in his review of the 1845 General Assembly's pronouncement of Roman Baptism as being invalid. Because of an insinuation by one of the speakers of the floor of the Assembly, Hodge said, "The being of a church does not depend upon the ministry, nor the being of the ministry on the rite of ordination."³ When Hodge's position was challenged, he remarked that it would be "Popish" to argue otherwise.

Officers are necessary to the well-being of a nation, and no nation can long exist without them. But a nation does not cease to exist when the king or president dies. The nation would continue though every civil officer was cut off in a night; and blessed be God, the church would still live, though all ministers should die or apostatize at once. We believe...with the real living church of God in all ages, that if the ministry fails, the church can make a ministry; or rather that Christ, who is in his church by the Spirit, would then, as he does now, by his

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 400.

²See our pp.101f. Cf. our pp. 56-58.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), p. 455.

divine call constitute men ministers. It strikes us as most extraordinary for a Presbyterian to say that the ministry is essential to the church, and that it must enter into the definition; when our own book makes provision, first, for the organization of a church, and then for the election of its officers. A number of believers are constituted a church, and then, and not until they¹ are a church, they elect their elders and call a pastor.

However, Hodge also believed that the ministry was a "divine institution" designed to be "perpetual" for the well being or "edification and extension of the church."² He elaborated this by setting forth the office of the ministry and its functions, and then the nature and sphere of a particular minister's appointment.

The Ministry as Office

The first thing Hodge insisted upon was that the ministry should be thought of as "properly" an office and not merely a work. It is a position "which cannot be assumed at pleasure by any and every one" even though they may be personally qualified to perform ministerial duties. A man must be regularly appointed to the ministry by some competent authority, just as judges or magistrates must be appointed to the posts which they occupy before they are invested with certain rights, duties and obligations. "The ministry is in this sense an office" which other people are "bound to recognize and respect".³ Hodge said this was proved:

(1.) From the titles given to ministers in the Scriptures, which imply official station. (2.) From their qualifications being specified in the Word of God, and the mode of judging

¹Hodge, "Is the Church of Rome a part of the Visible Church?", BRPR (April, 1846), pp. 330-331.

²Ibid., p. 330.

³Hodge, "Demission of the Ministry", BRPR (April, 1859), pp. 361-362.

of those qualifications being prescribed. (3.) From the express command to appoint to the office only such as, on due examination, are found competent. (4.) From the record of such appointment in the Word of God. (5.) From the official authority ascribed to them in the Scriptures, and the command that such authority should be duly recognized.¹

The second point Hodge made was that the ministerial office had a divine origin and warrant. Christ ordained that there should be such officers in the church and appointed them to be His servants, messengers and ambassadors who speak in His name and by His authority. The ministry then derives its authority and powers from Christ, His commission and His Spirit, and not from the people. When the Holy Spirit dwells in the universal Church or body of Christ, He gives each member gifts, qualifications and functions. But certain members, who are given ministerial gifts and thus are qualified by the Spirit, are called to function as ministers or are divinely selected and appointed to the office. This divine call establishes the ministry as a divine institution or as an office of divine appointment.² Each church society, which is also a divine institution,³ has the necessary prerogatives "to perpetuate and extend itself, and to appoint men to all scriptural offices to that purpose. The ministry is a divine institution. It is appointed for the edification of saints and for the ingathering of those who are without. It is necessary, therefore, that a church should have ministers...."⁴

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 408.

²Ibid., pp. 408-409.

³See our pp. 134f.

⁴Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), p. 286.

Thus for Hodge, the ministry was in the first instance a divinely sanctioned and appointed office in a church society, and not a creation of that church designed to handle special functions. Even though all church power is vested radically in the people, this did not exclude the clergy. Thus the office of the ministry does not obtain its official authority or powers indirectly from the people but directly from Christ's Spirit. We will see later the church's authoritative role in both the appointment of a particular candidate to the office and its right to limit the exercise of that minister's office. But first we must understand the functions Hodge saw attached to the office itself.

Functions of the Ministerial Office

Hodge wrote that functions or powers "specified and granted in the word of God" to the ministry were "teaching, (which includes the administration of the sacraments;) ruling, and commissioning faithful men. These powers God has joined together so that he who has one of them has all. The very fact that these duties and powers are committed to a certain class of officers proves that they are not to be exercised by the people themselves."¹

Teaching

The first aspect of the teaching function was preaching. But to understand this we must compare what Hodge wrote about preaching with what and how he preached. He admitted that in one sense it is

¹Hodge, "The Elder Question", p. 266. Hodge's parenthesis.

"every man's duty, provided he has received the knowledge of the gospel, to preach, i.e. to make it (the plan of salvation) known to others." But "official preaching" is done only by the "class of men set apart according to Christ's command, to devote themselves to this work."¹ Although Hodge believed that ruling elders had a right to expound the scriptures and exhort the people in cases when a minister was absent,² this was not their full time vocation and could not be considered official preaching as could that done by those who "live by the gospel".³ The proper attitude for preaching, that is, seeking and being full of the Holy Spirit, was most likely to be maintained by those who were not distracted by secular interests and occupations.⁴ For Hodge, this attitude was the most important element of successful preaching. It secured and made effectual the "matter" and "manner" of preaching.⁵ The "state of mind" and the "spirit of piety" with which a minister approaches the Bible determine the faithfulness of his preaching the pure and whole truth of God.⁶ To the ministers as "earthen vessels" is committed the divine treasure of the Word of God. For this difficult task they cannot trust in their own wisdom, strength or watchfulness. They must look constantly to the Holy Spirit for help against the enemies

¹Hodge, PS, p. 311.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1857), p. 488.

³Hodge, PS, p. 311.

⁴See our p. 261.

⁵Hodge, PS, pp. 318-319.

⁶Hodge, "Suggestions to Theological Students", BRPR (January, 1833), pp. 101, 112.

to which this treasure is exposed, i.e. "our own hearts, our own understandings, the traditions of men; the force of public opinion; the speculations of philosophy; the assaults of false teachers; the machinations of Satan." The only way for the ministry to resist these enemies is "not to discover truth, but simply to ascertain what is revealed as truth and to hold it fast without adulteration."¹ The success of this ministerial task results from the possession of these right motives: "loyalty to Christ, zeal for his glory, love for his person, the desire to establish and extend his kingdom.... There are other motives, as the good of men, their improvement, happiness and salvation; but these are all insufficient and subordinate."² Hodge did not think the preacher acquired these on his own, but when he was filled with the Holy Spirit and acted as His special organ.

However, to be a "successful agent in communicating the truth", the preacher must not only have the Spirit as his "sanctifier", but also as his "teacher". From this, according to Hodge, arise the other two elements of successful preaching where the ministry is an organ of the Spirit. The "matter" of preaching should be "only what is contained in the word of God, which is the record of the teachings of the Holy Ghost."³ The "subject" of preaching is the doctrines concerning Christ's person and work, "the method of salvation through him; what we must do to obtain an interest in his salvation", and

¹Hodge, PS, pp. 321-322.

²Ibid., p. 320.

³Ibid., p. 318.

"the duties which we owe to him."¹ This subject "is the wisdom derived from God; which he has revealed, as distinguished from any form of knowledge of human origin."² The "object" of preaching, contended Hodge, "is the exaltation and glory of Christ; that he may be known, worshiped and obeyed." Again, the temporal and the eternal well-being of men are legitimate, but subordinate.

On the "mode" of preaching, Hodge thought that because "there can be no other foundation of the church than that doctrine" preached concerning the truth about Christ's person and work,³ the preacher must never pervert that doctrine but must render it intelligible and adapted "to the end of convincing and converting sinners and edifying the people of God."⁴ Nevertheless, the manner or form of preaching should not be metaphysical or rhetorical, but scriptural and spiritual.⁵ Preaching does not rely upon the preacher's skill in argument or persuasion but on an exhibition of proof by the Spirit.⁶ Therefore, the preacher should not "pre-meditate" on either the matter or manner of preaching,⁷ but must rely completely upon both the Spirit's revealed doctrines and upon Him to illuminate and convey saving knowledge to the hearer. Although

¹Hodge, PS, p. 316.

²Hodge, I C, pp. 35, 17f, 32f.

³Ibid., p. 55.

⁴Hodge, PS, p. 312.

⁵Ibid., p. 318.

⁶Hodge, I C, pp. 31-32.

⁷Hodge, PS, p. 318.

other Christians or officers "diffuse the knowledge of Christ" indirectly, the gospel goes wherever ministers go so that they "bring life to some and death to others."¹ Therefore, if the preacher is blind to either the truth or the Spirit, he will destroy both himself and that church.² However, if the minister remains faithful in his function, he "will receive a crown of righteousness"³ and the people of God will be edified.

On Hodge's own preaching, his son wrote,

The matter presented was a clear analysis of the scriptural passage, or theme, doctrinal or practical, chosen for the occasion. An exhaustive statement and clear illustration of the question. An exhibition of the evidence of the doctrine and of the grounds and reasons, methods, conditions and limits of the experience of duty. A development of each doctrine on the side of experience and practice; a demonstration of the practical character of all doctrine and of the doctrinal basis of all genuine religious experience and practice.⁴

Upon examination of the subject and object of Hodge's sermon manuscripts as well as his Conference outlines, it seems that his preaching was characterized by-and-large as being doctrinal discourses addressed to reason. Lyman Atwater, his seminary associate, reported that Hodge took "the forms of thought and speech of the lecture room to the pulpit."⁵ This may be why William Paxton, another close

¹Ibid., pp. 314-315.

²Ibid., p. 311.

³Ibid., p. 317.

⁴LCH, pp. 457-458.

⁵Lyman H. Atwater, A Discourse Commemorative of the Late Dr. Charles Hodge (Princeton: Charles S. Robinson, 1878), p. 22.

friend, said that Hodge's preaching was unaffectionate, unpopular and meant for the well-educated.¹ A.A. Hodge admitted that his father's students would take notes of his sermons in order to have permanent use of the "mass of coherent thought."² While some men superimposed moralisms on scripture, Hodge, in his eagerness to instruct both students and his church in scholastic Reformed doctrine, seemed to cloud his exegesis and expositional discourses by this "theological predilection". As B.B. Warfield, one of his more famous students, wrote, "often texts were quoted (by Hodge) to support doctrines of which they did not treat; and a meaning was sometimes extracted from a passage which it was far from bearing."³ But this was also the result of his common sense rationalism. One of the hermeneutical rules he taught his students was that "As all mankind has certain feelings in common and agree in certain obvious truths there is something which is fitly called common sense of mankind. And in explaining any author (or the scriptures) we should give such an interpretation as will be consistent with this common sense."⁴ When it was said of Hodge that "as a rational being, he could not and would not accept contradictions",⁵ one can understand why at times he succumbed to forcing the scriptures and

¹Discourses Commemorative of the Life and Work of Charles Hodge, D.D., L.L.D. (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead 1879), pp. 13-14, 17.

²LCH., p. 458.

³Ibid., p. 590.

⁴Hodge, Lecture: No. VIII (February, 1824), "Hermeneutics" MS File D at P.T.S.

⁵Atwater, Discourse, p. 19. Cf. pp. 15f.

fitting his sermons into a theological system. The main differences that can be observed when comparing his sermons with his lecture notes or his books are: 1) his development of doctrine in preaching did not include as many names and did not cite sources in his caustic attack on differing systems of theology; and 2) he closed his sermons with exhortations for adherence to truth and piety. This latter aspect leaned more toward directing the people's attention upon self than upon their community.

Although A.A. Hodge reported that his father "seldom used the same preparation twice", but when preaching, he prepared a "new paper",¹ Hodge's sermon manuscripts reveal that he preached many sermons, without revision of a single word, as many as twenty-one times and over a period of more than forty years.² His sermons in their material and construction were largely irrelevant to the contemporary society except in minor references to the pious religious experience of individuals. This might be because most of his congregations were his Princeton seminary students. In 1848, Gardiner Spring questioned even the presence of this latter aspect. He accused seminary professors (the acknowledged leader of the most influential seminary by then being Hodge) of being ignorant of the problems facing the Christian and the community, and that their

¹LCH, p. 458; Hodge, PS, p. vii.

²Hodge recorded the dates and places where he preached at the end of each sermon, e.g. N.S. No. 10 "Sermons, New Series, 1-47" MS H6624sf at P.T.S. first preached Dec. 9, 1821, and last preached Jan. 15, 1863; Sermon on 2 Peter 1:21 "Sermons Preached and Re-preached between 1825-1874" MS H6624sq at P.T.S. first preached Feb. 25, 1845, and last preached Feb. 7, 1874.

sermons and lectures were imbued with "rigid orthodoxy and well-defined symbols of faith", and were void of a healthy balance of pastoral insight. Bemoaning the fact that certain professors had never been pastors, Spring said,

They savor of the cloister, but not of the pulpit; they savor of scholarship and intellect....Once in four, or six weeks...they come before their pupils (to preach) with a highly elaborate and finished discourse, - a banquet for a king, and not for the people....Mere scholars, those who know more of books than of men, and more of theological halls than the pulpit, ought not to be invested with the trust of educating a whole generation of young men for the Christian ministry....Our theological teachers ought to be men who have known something of 'the burden and heat of the day,'...who have come in contact with the common mind, and preached the Gospel to the common people.¹

It is obvious that Hodge considered sermons as timeless doctrinal treatises because to him they should be derived from the eternal truths revealed by the Holy Spirit and addressed to the intellect common to all Christendom. He thought of extemporaneous preaching as belittling the minister's peculiar official duty of teaching because it relied on the "time of delivery" and the fact that the sermon could not be preached again. But reading a sermon "more or less freely" is one of the very best means of securing "instructive and effective sermons", a "studious progressive ministry" and the "intellectual progress of our church".² J.F. Hageman wrote,

¹Gardiner Spring, The Power of the Pulpit: or Thoughts Addressed to Christian Ministers and Those Who Hear Them (New York: Baker & Scribner, 1848), pp. 379-389. Hodge did not answer this accusation in his article written with J.A. Alexander, "Dr. Spring on the Power of the Pulpit", BRPR (July, 1848), pp. 463-489.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1849), pp. 455-457.

"Had he (Hodge) thrown away his notes and trusted to the inspiration of the moment, as he did sometimes on less public occasions, he would have been a most captivating preacher."¹ But this would have been against the grain of Hodge's entire theological approach. While the revivalists of his day and most Baptist and Methodist preachers employed the charm of sound, Hodge worked consistently with the principle that the sermon was an instrument for instructing the ignorant or correcting those mistaken in doctrinal truths. Commenting on the role of preaching in public services, he wrote,

Knowledge in the Bible is represented as the essential element of religion. There can be no true worship of God without adequate knowledge of God; there can be no repentance, faith, or holy living unless the truths on which these exercises and this living are dependent are understood, and are present in the mind. Religion is a reasonable, that is (*λογική*) a rational service, with which ignorance is incompatible. Christian ministers, therefore, are always in the New Testament called *διδάσκαλοι*, teachers. Their great commission received from Christ was 'to teach all nations.'²

Thus in his sermon for the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, Hodge said the "Church, from the beginning of the world has, by divine appointment, been an educational institute...for maintaining and promoting the truth." And the preachers of Scotland have been the most faithful and successful, because they have taught their people "Christianity as a system of doctrines and duties."³

¹John F. Hageman, History of Princeton and Its Institutions, 2nd Ed., 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. 1879), Vol. 2, pp. 411-412.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 707.

³Hodge, Teaching Office of the Church, pp. 4, 6.

We may conclude our observations of Hodge's concept of preaching by noting that it was largely void of divine mystery. Although he asserted that the doctrines preached are not addressed to reason,¹ he seems to have made his own preaching a rational discourse by never admitting the unintelligible and explaining away all mystery by appealing to logic instead of to faith. For Hodge, the Gospel itself is a mystery in that it requires illumination or regeneration of the hearer by the Holy Spirit before he can spiritually understand it. But one wonders whether Hodge believed that the official preacher could really trust in the Holy Spirit to use his preaching unless the preacher was certain of his doctrinal facts. The dangers of perverting the truth or failing to defend it when attacked demanded an educated orthodox ministry,² but such a ministry without the element of humble faith became more polemic in character than zealous in the proclamation of the Word of Grace to everyday Christian life. One Presbyterian commented in 1889,

It is a matter of common remark that in the last generation we had too much preaching of doctrine; in other words, too much of the teaching-gift in the ministry. The ministers were trained in the theological seminaries to teach, and they did teach. The work of the pastor and the preacher, so far as it differed from the work of the teacher, was more or less neglected. The consequence was, that the people understood the Scriptures and the doctrines of the Church..., but were not so much stirred up to Christian activity.³

The second aspect of the teaching function attached to the ministerial office was the administration of the sacraments. We

¹Hodge, I C, p. 33.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1844), p. 448.

³Briggs, Whither?, pp. 40-41.

recall that Hodge treated the sacraments as a "means and a mode of divine worship." Regardless of who performed this precept of worship, it made no efficacious difference to the sacraments being a means of grace or on their celebration being an effectual profession of the Christian religion as long as the administrator and participant were both professed Christians.¹ However, their administration as "a matter of order and propriety"² should be done by those in the ministerial office of a church society. Therefore, it is wrong to believe "that, in virtue of the universal priesthood of believers, all Christians have equal right to...baptize, and to administer the Lord's Supper."³ Hodge reasoned that if Christ appointed the office of the minister with this inherent legal duty, it would be contrary to scriptural precept for other Christians in an organized church society to perform this function. Besides having this divine assignment, the minister is most apt to administer them in the regular scriptural manner, thus preventing the truths of the Gospel as exhibited in the sacraments from being perverted. This rested on Hodge's belief that when a candidate had been duly called, appointed or ordained to the work of the Presbyterian ministry, he had been judged to possess the requisite ministerial gifts and to have been educated as to his duty of instructing the people in orthodox doctrine.⁴

¹See our pp.192f.

²Hodge, ST, III, p. 514.

³Hodge, "Demission of the Ministry", BRPR (April, 1859), p. 361. Our underlining.

⁴See our pp. 323f, 231f.

Although Hodge had said earlier that ministers are Christ's ambassadors and speak in His name and by His authority, it is noteworthy that he did not mean that the minister of the sacraments represented to the church in any way the sole Priesthood of Christ. Is not Christ the one true minister of the sacraments? Does not the ministerial office of a church in a spiritual sense have to be grounded in and continually participate in the ministry of Christ? Is there not a sense in which the ministry of the sacraments stands within the corporate priesthood of the whole Church catholic which itself must represent the sacramental Body of Christ to the world? Hodge never considered these questions but thought of Christ's relationship to the church and the ministry as primarily that of a theocratic and judicial King. He allowed the Roman Catholics to monopolize the concept of Christ's Priesthood. Another important fallacy in Hodge's concept of the ministry of the sacraments was that he never mentioned the theological significance of the minister preaching the Word of God along with the administration of the sacraments. He dismissed the thought that there was any "inherent, supernatural power of the Word which is an essential part of these divine ordinances."¹ He seemed to be unaware of Calvin's position that

the sacrament requires preaching to beget faith. And we need not labor to prove this when it is perfectly clear what Christ did, what he commanded us to do, what the apostles followed, and what the purer Church observed. Indeed, it was known even from the beginning of the world that whenever God gave a sign to the holy patriarchs it was inseparably

¹Hodge, ST, III, p. 507.

linked to doctrine, without which our senses would have been stunned in looking at the bare sign. Accordingly, when we hear the sacramental word mentioned, let us understand the promise, proclaimed in a clear voice by the minister, to lead the people by the hand wherever the sign tends and directs us.¹

Ruling

The second function of the ministerial office was ruling, that is, governing and disciplining the church society. We need not expound this function itself because it involved essentially those powers described in our last chapter. Under normal circumstances the minister functions as ruler in co-operation with the people or their representatives. However, Hodge, under his doctrine of the ministry, makes a significant distinction. Whereas the office of the elder represents the power of the people, the ministerial office has inherent governing powers and authority which are in no way delegated by the people. Hodge pointed to the scriptural term "bishop" as giving the minister the right "to exercise episcopal supervision".²

¹Calvin, Institutes, IV, xiv, 4. Cf. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, p. 136. Wallace reports that for Calvin "the action of Christ in the sacraments...is made efficacious because of the Word", which is accompanied by the promise of the Holy Spirit.

²Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 410. It is interesting to note that nine years earlier, Hodge had supported the General Assembly's resolution to discontinue the use of the word bishop in reference to ministers, because of the Anglican and Roman connotations. He wrote, "The question then is, is it desirable to change this long-established usage, and to restore to the word its scriptural meaning. We have no hesitation in saying that if practicable, it would be desirable; but believing it to be impracticable, we regard the attempt as altogether inexpedient." "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1846), p. 419.

There were two main consequences of the minister being clothed with ruling power in virtue of his office. First, when he was sent where there were no churches, he exercised his official powers by gathering and founding churches.¹ In the case of some mission communities, he might for a while function actually as sole governor of the church he organized because "republicanism" should not be instituted among the heathen who "for a time...may properly be retained in a state of pupilage."² Second, if the minister labors in a church society already established, he exercises his powers usually in concert with other presbyters and with the representatives of the people. However, because his function of ruling does not depend upon the people, except that they must approve of his qualifications for his office, the minister has the intrinsic right to exert his governing functions in any church council of which he is a member.³ This seemed to provide the basis for Hodge's defense of ordained ministers validly (although not regularly) acting in church councils without the presence of elders and without a quorum of its standing members (ministers) or as sole members of court commissions.⁴

Ordaining

The third function assigned to the ministerial office was commissioning or ordaining other ministers to the office. The nature

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 410.

²Hodge, "American Board,...", BRPR (January, 1849), pp. 7-11.

³Hodge, "The Elder Question", pp. 267-268.

⁴See our pp. 162f. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 446f; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1847), pp. 400f.

of this function can only be seen in light of Hodge's way of dealing with a particular candidate's appointment to the office.¹ However, it can be noted presently that, for Hodge, because this was an ecclesiastical, judicial act involving the highest office in the church society, it could only be performed by one holding a similar office. But besides this, it was the exclusive executive function always belonging to any individual minister as such.²

Consequences of Functions

From these functions of teaching, ruling and ordaining, it seems that Hodge drew two further conclusions about the nature of the ministerial office. First, the office in itself is permanent. That is, it has continued and will continue to exist and to appear throughout history in every church society. The primary reason for this is that the ministerial gifts and their corresponding functions are permanent. That is, the Holy Spirit bestows the gifts, functions, powers and rights on various individual Christians from time to time. Hodge reasoned, "Every office implies a gift of which it is the appointed organ. If, therefore, a gift be permanent, the organ for its exercise must be permanent."³ A second reason for this permanence is the perpetual obligation upon the church that accompanies the commission to preach the gospel to every creature and to build up the faith and piety of Christians. Church societies "must always

¹See our pp. 324f.

²Hodge, "Rights of Ruling Elders", BRPR (April, 1843), pp. 315f; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 439f.

³Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 410.

have the officers which are (their) divinely-appointed organs for the accomplishment of this work."¹ Finally, the example of the apostles appointing men to such a position and the fact that the office itself appeared in history and exists today make it indisputable that the ministerial office is permanent. Hodge qualified this permanence in two ways. First, it was not dependent on any spiritual or ecclesiastical genealogy as claimed by the Roman Catholic concept of apostolic succession; nor did it imply any necessary historical unity or continuity in the ministry. Second, this permanence was related to the office and not necessarily to the individual in that office.²

The second consequence evolving from the functions of the ministerial office was the equality or parity of all clergymen.³ Hodge reasoned, "If the Holy Spirit, as dwelling in the church, is the source of its several prerogatives, it follows that there can be no offices in the church, of divine authority, to which he does not call its members by imparting to them the appropriate gift." The original church offices created by the Spirit's gifts and appointed to the ministry of doctrine were those of apostles, prophets, and presbyters. The gifts of the apostles that qualified them for their work were

¹Ibid., p. 411.

²See our pp. 251f, 329f.

³Unless otherwise noted, the following points are taken from Hodge, "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), pp. 553-555 and "What Is Presbyterianism?", pp. 411-414.

first, the word of wisdom, or a complete revelation of the doctrines of the gospel; secondly, the gift of the Holy Ghost, in such measure as to render them infallible in the communication of the truth and in the exercise of their authority as rulers; thirdly, the gift of working miracles in confirmation of their mission, and of communicating the Holy Ghost by the imposition of their hands.

The Prophets received gifts of "partial revelations and occasional inspiration". Hodge argued that it is admitted that in the apostolic church the apostles and prophets were superior to presbyters who had none of these gifts. However, since there is an "inseparable... connection between an office and its gifts", and because "it requires no proof that these gifts (of the apostles and of the prophets) are no longer possessed by any order of men in the church," therefore "it requires no further proof that the apostolic and prophetic offices are no longer extant." This is confirmed by the absence of scriptural command to continue them. Hodge concluded that since "the gifts of teaching and ruling, which constituted a presbyter, are continued" and the scriptural precept to ordain such officers is perpetual, ministers (presbyters) are "the highest permanent officers of the church for which we have any divine warrant" and "the parity of the clergy is a necessary consequence." Hodge claimed that this destroyed the legitimacy of the Anglican and Roman Catholic prelatic polity. He also said that the bishops in Lutheran and Methodist churches and the superintendents of the early church in Scotland were all merely human arrangements.

Minister's Appointment to Office

Hodge has previously stated that the ministerial office itself is of divine appointment. He also believed that ultimately the

ministerial candidate was qualified, called and appointed to that office by the Holy Spirit. However, a church had the power, obligation and right to judge whether or not any particular candidate had been spiritually called before allowing him to hold a ministerial office in their society. In this sense a church or its appropriate organs call, appoint or ordain men to the office and work of the ministry.¹ With somewhat of a repetition of some of his earlier points on the ministry, Hodge explained the three stages through which a church should require an individual to go before he has ecclesiastical ministerial authority.

Stages of Candidate's Appointment

The first was the all-essential inward, divine call. Hodge thought that this actually occurred when "the Holy Spirit confers the gifts for the ministry; and by thus conferring them, exciting the desire to exercise them for the glory of God and the service of Christ, thereby manifests his will that those thus favoured should consecrate themselves to the preaching of the gospel."² Although Hodge insisted that that which distinguished the clergy from the laity did not arise from the diversity of gifts,³ he nevertheless defines the divine call by just such a diversity of gifts, "so if any man has received ministerial gifts, he has received a call to the ministry."⁴ His argument again is as above.

¹Hodge, "Demission of the Ministry", BRPR (April, 1859), p. 362.

²Ibid., p. 365.

³Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 408. Cf. Our pp.161-166.

⁴Hodge, I C, p. 263.

Every office in the church presupposes a gift, and is but the organ through which that gift is legitimately exercised for edification. It is therefore, this inward call of the Holy Spirit which constitutes, in a manner, a minister; that is which gives him the authority and ability to exercise its functions for the₁ conversion of sinners and the edification of believers.

Therefore the minister cannot be self-called, called by the people of a church or by magistrates because a true call is linked with special religious gifts which can come only from the Holy Spirit.²

The second step of the appointment required evidence of this spiritual call. To the candidate this meant he must have a "consciousness of the inward gift and drawing of the Spirit, confirmed by those external workings of providence which indicate the will of God as to his vocation."³ Even if the candidate is convinced of the validity of his own call, it must be duly confirmed by a church's judgment as to whether the candidate first, possessed the gifts and orthodox qualifications they deemed necessary, and second, was led to seek the office from pious motives evolving from the Holy Spirit.⁴ Hodge believed that this confirmation could be either extraordinary or ordinary. The former occurred when the measure of ministerial gifts or success placed the divine call "beyond all reasonable doubt" as he inferred was the case of Calvin and Farel.⁵ The latter occurred only through close official

¹Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 389.

²Hodge, PS, pp. 315-316, 310-311.

³Hodge, "Demission of the Ministry", BRPR (April, 1859), p. 365.

⁴Hodge, PS, pp. 313-314.

⁵Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 380.

examination, when a church was satisfied that the candidate was "apt to teach, well instructed, able rightly to divide the Word of God, sound in faith, able to resist gainsayers, able to rule their own families," and had "the personal qualities which give him authority...(i.e.) grave, sober, temperate, vigilant, of good behavior and of good report."¹ Also the candidate needed to have "bodily qualifications; good health and the necessary gifts of utterance."² From Hodge's earlier insistence that the people should perpetuate their own peculiar confessional doctrines, it can be understood why he considered the primary point of examination should be concentrated on Old School orthodoxy and aptness to defend it.³ This ordinary examination should be done by the official organ of a church society which in the case of the Presbyterian Church was the Presbytery.⁴ It is at this stage that the people, through their representatives, may exert their powers to determine or maintain the character of their church's ministry.

If the candidate passed this examination, he would proceed to the final step of his appointment, that is, his ordination.

"Ordination," wrote Hodge,

is the solemn expression of the judgment of the church, by those appointed to deliver such judgment, that the candidate

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 410. Cf. Hodge, I C, p. 263.

²Hodge, PS, p. 311.

³See our pp.229f.

⁴It should be remembered that Hodge placed more faith in the education of ministers than in this type of examination as a means for securing the requisite orthodoxy for Presbyterian ministers. See our pp. 231-232.

is truly called of God to take part in this ministry, thereby authenticating to the people the divine call. This (public) authentication, or ordination is, under all ordinary circumstances, the necessary condition for the exercise of the ministry in the church.¹

By this definition, we see the nature and mode Hodge assigned to ordination. First, he did not think of ordination as a sacrament, even in his own concept of a sacrament. He attacked the Roman Catholics for making ordination a divine spiritual rite which through the imposition of hands by a similar bishop gave the priest a supernatural power of grace which allowed him to render the sacraments efficacious, to remit sins, etc. Hodge protested that this view of ordination made the ministry dependent upon "an internal something"² and rendered the church entirely dependent on the ministry by making grace and salvation dependent on an uninterrupted succession of valid ordinations. Also this would make the clergy "a distinct class, separated by internal and indelible peculiarities of eminence from their fellow Christians, and exalted over them, not merely in office by inward grace."³ For Hodge, ordination itself had nothing to do with spiritual grace except that it was a public acknowledgment that the Holy Spirit had already sufficiently influenced the candidate so as to entitle him to the ministerial office.⁴ Thus, Hodge declared, "Ordination confers

¹Hodge, "Demission of the Ministry", BRPR (April, 1859), p. 365.

²Ibid., p. 363.

³Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders, BRPR (April, 1854), p. 386.

⁴For Hodge 2 Timothy 1:6 had "no necessary reference to ordination." Hodge, "The Church Review on the Permanency of the Apostolic Office", BRPR (January, 1856), p. 25.

neither grace nor office."¹ On the other hand, he also argued that "ordination confers office" in that it is an ecclesiastical legal ceremony, whereby first, a church's judgment of the fitness of the candidate is executed, and second, the candidate himself is inducted into the office of the ministry and thereby recognized as having certain authority others do not have (i.e. in teaching and in ordaining).²

The mode of ordination depended on the "state of the Church". If the "rulers of the Church become heretical and oppressive, the people have the right to renounce their authority, and to follow those who they see are called of God to the ministry." But when a particular church society is settled and orthodox (as the Old School Presbyterian Church), the people are morally bound to adhere to their church's constitutional methods of ordination. Hodge argued that having a regular procedure of ordination avoided confusion, curtailed the fanaticism of people who might make and depose ministers at their pleasure, and prevented individuals from assuming the office without the proper consent of the church society.³

He emphasized again that the actual ordination ceremony can only be performed by clergymen because only they have the inherent power to execute the judgment of the church society in matters

¹Hodge, "The Church, its Perpetuity", BRPR (July, 1856), p. 713.

²Hodge, "Rights of Ruling Elders", BRPR (April, 1843), p. 324.

³Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 390.

involving the word and the sacraments.¹ Also, ordination was simply and purely a "ministerial act; it is performed by ministers as such, and not merely as members of presbytery."² Not only did this rule out any participation by the elder or the people, as we have seen,³ but this caused Hodge to approve of the prerogative a single minister had in ordaining apart from the context of the corporate form of the ministry. He admitted that "three, may be the safest minimum that could be fixed on as the general rule (for regular ordination), but there is nothing in the nature of ordination and nothing in the laws of Christ which makes that number essential" to a valid ordination.⁴ There was a twofold issue involved in this for Hodge. On the one hand, expediency required that when a minister was sent where there was no church society in order to gather and found churches, he must have the right to ordain. Likewise, if an ordination ceremony was held in cases of emergency without other ministers being present, such an ordination could not be void.⁵ On the other hand, by allowing such an individualistic enactment of ordination, Hodge was attempting to defend his premise that the authority and powers of the minister are innate to his office

¹Ibid., p. 391.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 441f.

³See our pp. 162f.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1850), p. 482. Hodge does not take into account these passages: I Timothy 4:14 and Matthew 18:20.

⁵Ibid., p. 483; Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", p. 410; "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 563.

because they derived from Christ's Spirit and not from the people or their ecclesiastical constitutional policies.

The laying on of hands, for Hodge, had no significance in the rite of ordination except that it made a "becoming ceremony". He argued that it was Popish to think it communicated any divine influences.¹ Nevertheless, when used in the ordination ceremony of a minister, only other clergymen may join in this imposition of hands, for otherwise it might appear as if the candidate was not being inducted into the ministerial office.

It is interesting to note that Hodge never commented on the significance of prayer in the ordination ceremony. It seems as if he assumed that the spiritual qualifications of the candidate were complete prior to the judicial rite. For to admit the absolute necessity of prayer would have been, to his mind, to imply that at ordination specially required promises and blessings were conferred upon the minister, as if ex opere operato. Probably this is why he insisted that the appointment of Christians to the ministerial office is ultimately and validly done by God or the Holy Spirit with or without ordination. All that was necessary for a particular person to assume his appointment to the office was for the professing Christians of his day and community to give their consent either explicitly or implicitly.² This seems to mean for Hodge that the actual, divine appointment to the ministerial office is made only

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1842), pp. 482f.

²Cf. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 455-456.

because certain individual Christians have been elected to possess special spiritual gifts, and not also because they are called by Christ and then given His sufficient grace to fulfill effectively the ministry grounded in His own Ministry.¹

Permanence of Appointment

Once an individual Presbyterian ministerial candidate had taken the final step of ecclesiastical ordination to office, there remained the questions of how permanent was his appointment and in what sphere he had the authority to exercise the functions of his office. First, Hodge contended that the Roman Catholic priest permanently retained his office because of the inward grace that was supposedly given to him at his ordination. Protesting against this, Hodge said that the Holy Spirit is not received in a "specific form or mode of manifestation, in ordination", nor does the Spirit always remain with the minister. If this were true, the ministerial office could "neither be voluntarily laid aside, nor can a man be deprived of it" by any act of a church.² For Hodge, this was diametrically opposed to his concept of the ministry. Recalling what he said under the power of the keys, a church has the power and the right to depose a minister for some grave moral offense or religious heresy and make him merely a layman.³

What is deposition but the declaration, on judicial grounds, on the part of a presbytery, that a minister of the gospel

¹See our pp. 102f, 56f.

²Hodge, "Demission of the Ministry", BRPR (April, 1859), pp. 363-364.

³See our p. 251.

is no longer to be regarded as such? And what is that but a reversal of the judgment pronounced at his ordination? It is saying that the presbytery erred in deciding that the person in question was called of God to the ministry; for if he had been thus called, it was for life, and no presbytery could take away a permanent office conferred by God.¹

From this, coupled with what Hodge said before about the process of a candidate being appointed, it seems that an ordained minister may either exercise his ministerial gifts fallaciously or at some time lose possession of these special gifts.

The same rationalism pervaded Hodge's defense of the right of demission. When a minister promises at his ordination "to devote himself for life to the work of the ministry....this promise is obviously conditional."² If later he becomes satisfied that he was not called of God, that he was physically, intellectually or spiritually inept, or that he did not want to perform the obligatory functions of his office, he may lay aside his ordination. This does not reflect on his Christian character but is simply the result of new evidence in opposition to the evidence of a divine call, i.e. "the want of fitness for the office, the want of a desire to discharge its duties, the want of success, and the consequent inability to serve God or the church in the work of the ministry."³ In the case of a minister who becomes physically incapacitated, Hodge thought it to be simply common sense that if he wished to withdraw from his office, the presbytery should not

¹Ibid., p. 367.

²Ibid., p. 366.

³Ibid., p. 367.

prevent him. However, more was at stake with a minister who either by honest admission or neglect of duty was not called of God to the ministry, even though the presbytery had thought otherwise at his ordination. Individuals and church councils are not infallible. Their mistakes need to be corrected if the church society and its ministry are to maintain their particular character. Highly protective of the Old School Presbyterian bulwark, which for Hodge depended primarily on the orthodoxy of its ministers, he completed his argument for the non-permanent nature of any individual's appointment to ministerial office.

Besides, it is a great evil that our church courts should be encumbered with nominal members, who are incapable of discharging the duties of membership. And it is a still greater evil that men should be allowed to sit in those courts, and exercise the powers of an office, to which all concerned are satisfied they have no legitimate call, and the duties of which they cannot fulfill. Such ministers are not only an incumbrance to our church courts, disturbing the natural balance of our system, but it is a disgrace to the ministry and to the church, to have men notoriously incompetent, (however worthy they be,) and who are merely nominal ministers - men who are laymen in their whole spirit and pursuits, designated and recognized as invested with the sacred office...; it would be unwise to make the ministry a cul-de-sac, which whoever wanders into the dark, must stay in it. It would be far better to make the egress from the ministry so wide that all who want to leave, or who ought to leave it, may do so with the least possible difficulty or delay.

Against the Independents, Hodge pointed out that the permanence of a Presbyterian minister's appointment to office was not dependent on his relationship with a particular people. Not only could a Presbyterian clergyman be ordained sine titulo,² but those who do

¹Ibid., pp. 368-369.

²See our pp. 163, 254f.

become pastors retain their ordination regardless of how often they change churches. The functions of the minister are designed for edification of all Christians. "When a man is ordained, the office into which he is inducted has relation to the church as a whole. All the prerogatives and obligations of that office are conveyed though he has no separate congregation confided to his care."¹ A minister's appointment is permanent just as a naval officer's appointment is permanent; that is, a captain retains his office when on shore as well as when he is in command of a ship, or whenever he is transferred from one ship to another.²

Within this view of permanence, Hodge has mentioned a certain sense in which the ministerial office has a relationship to the visible Church catholic. He was thoroughly opposed to the "re-ordination" of clergymen from other churches seeking ministerial communion with his own denomination.³ Since all church societies had the right to appoint men to the ministry, all other churches should "recognize those thus appointed as ministers of Christ.... Presbyterians may recognize Methodist preachers as ministers of the gospel, and welcome them to their pulpits, but they cannot be expected to receive them in their own body or make them pastors of their own churches."⁴ Thus, while churches should acknowledge the

¹Hodge, "Support of the Clergy", BRPR (July, 1847), p. 371.

²Hodge, "Demission of the Ministry", BRPR (April, 1859), p. 363.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1852), p. 497.

⁴Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), pp. 286-287. Our underlining. The phrase "welcome them to their pulpits" is completely incongruous with Hodge's previous remarks and can only be a slip of the pen.

validity of each other's ordination, they are also obligated to "preserve the purity of its own ministry and churches."¹

Sphere of Exercising Appointment

Thus the sphere in which a minister had the authority to exercise his office was limited in one way to his own church society or mission field. Hodge defended this with two points. First, because each church society has the power and duty to determine and maintain its system of government, it has the right to judge and enforce the "circumstantial" aspects of the call to the ministry; that is, "the mode in which the consent of the Church is expressed, and the ceremonies by which that assent is publicly manifested."² Second, as a church is obligated to preserve its own doctrinal position, it has "a right to judge for itself of the qualifications of its own ministers";³ that is, only those who meet its particular "terms of ministerial communion"⁴ may function as an official minister in that church society.

When a Presbyterian minister is duly qualified, he is regarded as both an officer in the Old School Presbyterian Church and as possessing all the prerogatives attached to his office. However, he may not exercise his ministerial functions throughout the

¹Ibid., p. 286.

²Hodge, "The Church of England and Presbyterian Orders", BRPR (April, 1854), p. 392.

³Ibid.

⁴See our pp. 228f.

denomination. He is not ipso facto admitted to every church court because, as Hodge pointed out, each court has a right to judge the qualifications of its own members.¹ "If one presbytery should exercise its admitted right of ordination in contravention either of the laws of Christ, or of the rules of the Presbyterian Church, other presbyteries would not be bound to receive such a minister as a member."² Although all portions of the denomination have a treaty or constitution as to what should be the qualifications requisite for admitting a minister to their communion, each portion has the right to refuse a man to act as minister in their body for reasons of expediency.³ In effect then, Hodge thought that an ordained minister may exercise his powers without limitation only within his own presbytery. That is, a minister may perform all his official duties in respect to the Christians in this portion of the church society because all the people there, by their representatives, have consented either to his ordination or to his admission as a standing member of their supervising presbytery. However, the minister "has no right to exercise his authority either to preach or to rule in a particular congregation without their consent." He cannot become their pastor without being elected as such by the people.⁴ Again Hodge limited the pastor's acts by pointing out

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1835), pp. 465; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), pp. 490-491.

²Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), p. 286.

³See our p. 248.

⁴Hodge, "The Elder Question", pp. 267-268.

first, that they do not extend over the conscience of those voluntarily subjected to his ministerial authority,¹ and second, that certain of his pastoral acts (i.e. prayer) should be congenial with the "just demands of the people", otherwise he should withdraw as their spiritual guide.²

Even though Hodge has asserted above that the permanence of any individual's appointment to the ministerial office is qualified and the exercise of his appointment is limited within certain spheres, nevertheless we must remember that he continually insisted that the authority and powers themselves are inherent to the minister's office and thus, not derived from the church society. However, Hodge's over-emphasis on the evidence of the inward call or the qualifications which a church society may demand led him to a rather legalistic and almost anthropocentric doctrine of the ministry. He was keenly interested in the laws of Christ, the doctrines about Christ, and the Spirit of Christ, but these seemed to be from the perspective of man's judgment, man's claim of truth, and man's spiritual fitness. The result was that he over-emphasized man's control of the occupants of the office of the ministry and their functions. This led to his pre-occupation with the organizational machinery which could retain a unity of orthodox doctrine among all Presbyterian ministers. Hence there was the need for a structural unity as the third principle of ecclesiastical polity.

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), pp. 448f.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1864), p. 566; see our p. 292

Chapter VI The Unity of a Church Society

When expounding Hodge's thoughts on the formation of church societies, it was pointed out that, on the one hand, he believed that individual Christians should voluntarily join with fellow Christians in the duties of professing their faith and are obligated to subject themselves spiritually to each other's watch and care. On the other hand, the society which they formed was a divine institution and was animated by the Holy Spirit to the extent that its members' spiritual unity was expressed outwardly in harmonious views and actions concerning government, doctrine and discipline.¹

This view of a church society led Hodge not only to criticize any deliberate attempts of isolation by professing Christians who lived within a community which had a church, but also to condemn the individual members within a particular church who would not submit to the rulers, to the teaching or to the discipline of that church. By the same line of reasoning Hodge heartily protested against the isolation of congregations from an organized, denominational society and against those churches which acted independently of their own denomination. He said that the Independent or Congregational ecclesiastical polity was a denial of the inward organizing principle resulting from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He also argued that as a departure from the form of polity God

¹ See our pp. 130f.

ordained for a church society, it "must inevitably be productive of evil."¹ When a report was made at the 1855 General Assembly about the position of the Congregational churches in Massachusetts, Hodge asked the following:

Why is it that in a community founded by one of the most orthodox and pious set of men the world ever saw, where the truth has always been free, where intelligence and education are more generally diffused than in any other community of equal extent on earth, why is it that in such a community thought is more unsettled, that Unitarianism is so prevalent, and that Infidelity and Romanism are more active than in any other State of the American Union?²

He contended that the most obvious reason was the result of using an unscriptural polity.

Where there is no discipline over churches, the result must be the same, as where there is no discipline over individuals. If any Christian church should be organized on the principle of allowing every member to hold and profess just what opinions he pleases, it would very soon lose its distinction as a Christian character altogether. In like manner, where a denomination, or community of individual congregations, is organized on the principle of Independency, that community will be apt to lose its Christian character. If a garden is conducted on the plan of letting the weeds and fruits have an equal chance, the weeds will soon overrun the ground. There is a difference between license and liberty. The latter is not inconsistent with authority and supervision. What would become of a State in which each county and township was independent of all the rest? What would become of our national union, if we had no common legislature or judiciary? What would become of the Presbyterian Church, if one congregation might be Augustinian, another Pelegian, and another Socinian?³

Hodge proposed that there needed to be a common tribunal embracing all churches in a denomination. He thought that this

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1855), p. 499.

²Ibid., pp. 498-499.

³Ibid., p. 499.

naturally or spiritually evolved from the third jure divino principle for church organization. That is, the unity of a church society is consequential when the people or their representatives and presbyters join together in government by judicatories or representative assemblies whereby "a smaller part (of the church) is subject to a larger, and the larger to the whole."¹

Unity Expressed in Ascending Court System

In Hodge's day there were four types of ecclesiastical courts in the American Presbyterian Church: the Session, the Presbytery, the Synod, and the General Assembly.² As we have seen, Hodge claimed that theoretically each court independently possessed all church powers which were inherent in its constituting membership. However, the American Presbyterian courts had contracted an arrangement as expressed in a written constitution whereby each court was limited or restricted in the actual exercise of its powers.³

Hodge pointed out that the Session was "a parochial or congregational council charged with 'the spiritual government' of a particular church."⁴ Its office bearers have the right to legislate particular rules for governing, disciplining and instructing their own people, to execute these rules (which included admitting and dismissing members), and to judge any member of the congregation or Session who

¹Hodge, "What Is Presbyterianism?", pp. 414-415; "Presbyterianism", BRPR (July, 1860), p. 556.

²It should be noted that in the colonial period there were only sessions, presbyteries and the Synod. See our pp. 352f.

³See our pp. 225f, 132f. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1855), pp. 502-503.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), p. 475.

violated these rules or disobeyed their execution. The legislative, executive and judicial powers of the Session (or any church court) were limited in three ways. First, they could not be used with respect to purely secular affairs but must be concerned only with ecclesiastical things. Second, they could not impose anything upon a member as a rule of faith and practice which was contrary to the Bible. Even then the power must be exercised not in a civil, but only in a spiritual manner. Third, the Session could not legislate any rule that was inconsistent with the denomination's constitution. An "unconstitutional law is void ab initio"; therefore it should be disregarded by both the congregation and the higher courts.¹

If the Session attempted to exercise any power that transcended these limits, then it was up to the higher court, the Presbytery, to use its particular legislative, executive, and judicial powers to govern them accordingly. As the "representative, organ, and agent of the collective body of Christ's people included within its ecclesiastical limits,"² the Presbytery could make and enforce upon all its churches its own particular laws. By constitutional arrangement, the Presbytery had the responsibility for examining and arranging the ordination of ministers. Likewise it had the power to judge the qualification of other ministers seeking standing membership in the Presbytery, to install ministers, to supervise

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), p. 484.

²Ibid., p. 482.

and control their functions, and to discipline them by censor or removal. Just as the Session, the Presbytery's powers were limited to church affairs and by the Bible and the denomination's constitution.

"The synod is in fact a larger presbytery, and would have precisely the same authority, did not the constitution, for the sake of convenience make a distinction of powers between it and the presbyteries."¹ Although it did not ordain ministers, it did have legislative, executive and judicial powers superior to those of either the presbyteries or sessions within its bounds. In fact it could review and control all courts, clergy and people under its jurisdiction to insure that they conform to the laws of the Bible and the constitution.

According to the constitution, the General Assembly is the bond of union and confidence between all churches. It makes us one denomination. It is such a bond, by enabling the whole church, of which it is the representative, to take effectual care that the constitution, as to doctrine and order, is observed within all our bounds.²

This meant for Hodge that the constitutional status of the Assembly designated the right of its supremacy or the fact that it was "the highest legislative, judicial and executive body in the church."³ But he claimed that the foundation of this elevated position was inherent in the very nature of the General Assembly. As we have seen in the last two chapters, duly elected elders represent the

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), p. 475.

²Ibid., p. 485.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 454.

powers of the people, and the presbyter always possesses powers inherent in the ministerial office. Therefore, when both are delegated or commissioned to be members of the General Assembly, together they represent all church rights and powers of both the people and the clergy. Because the Assembly is the only council of the church which is "the representative of all its constituent parts (individuals, congregations, sessions, presbyteries and synods),"¹ it followed that such a court designed for the unity of the whole must inherently possess the greatest degree of authority and power of the church society. Whether the General Assembly was considered as acting as a "union of many congregations"² or "as the presbytery of the whole church,"³ Hodge claimed that the Assembly, through its supreme legislative, judicial and executive powers, could and should exercise comprehensive, immediate and final jurisdiction over all activities of the denomination in order to perpetuate the unique and pure doctrine and polity of Old School Presbyterianism.

To understand the significance of Hodge's almost rigidly high ecclesiasticism, we need to sketch the historical events which forced him to take such a position. We will see how paradoxically his over-reliance upon the General Assembly's paramount authority to maintain unity in the Presbyterian Church resulted from the events surrounding the divisions in the denomination. In addition we will

¹Hodge, "Discourse on Religion by Mr. Coit", BRPR (October, 1840), pp. 596-597.

²Ibid.

³Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1843), p. 459.

consider his defense of denominationalism and the ways in which he thought sects should have intercourse.

Presbyterian Unity and Division

The Old School-New School Split of 1837-1838

The causes, issues and proceedings of the 1837-1838 division of the Old School and New School Presbyterians into two separate churches are multifold, complex and beyond a comprehensive treatment in this thesis.¹ However, a brief account of the controversial scene is helpful for our understanding of Hodge's loyalties. First, it must be understood that Hodge was not a leader in the events preceeding this rupture² and was opposed to those of either party who used ecclesiastical politics. Nevertheless, he played an indirect influential role prior to 1837, and afterwards became the chief defender of the Old School's 1837-1838 actions and its ensuing brand of Presbyterianism.

It was not until about 1830 that the two contending parties emerged as the New School and the Old School. The New School were basically those Presbyterians with a background in New England Congregationalism, an orientation toward revivalistic Calvinism and an interest in voluntary, benevolent societies. They were largely

¹For an Old School interpretation of the historical events, see Samuel J. Baird, A History of the New School and of the Questions Involved in the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church in 1838 (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1868). For a New School account, see E.H. Gillett, History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, 1864), Vol. II.

²Hodge's youth and his illness during this period encumbered his prominent participation. For the majority of the time between 1833 and 1840, Hodge was confined by lameness to his home. LCH, p.236f.

concentrated in New York and the Ohio Valley. The character of the New School was primarily a result of two things: the "Plan of Union of 1801" and revivalism. The "Plan of Union" was a missionary program enacted by the General Assembly and the General Association (of Congregational churches) of Connecticut for the purpose of meeting the church needs of the expanding west. Most of the first migrations to western New York and the Midwest were people from New England. Although many settlers readily joined any of the newly founded Presbyterian churches, they carried with them their decentralized concept of church government and innovated the Presbyterian polity accordingly.¹

¹There had been a close kinship between Congregationalists and Presbyterians throughout the Eighteenth Century. Annual conventions of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia and Connecticut's General Association had been held from 1767 to 1776 to combine forces against the threat of an Anglican establishment in the colonies. In 1790 at the dawn of the great western migrations, the General Assembly unanimously declared that it was "peculiarly desirous to renew and strengthen every bond of union between brethren so nearly agreed in doctrine and forms of worship as the members of the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches evidently are...." It was resolved "that the ministers of the Congregational churches of New England, be invited to renew their annual convention with the clergy of the Presbyterian Church." Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol. 1789-1820, p. 29. In 1792 the General Assembly and the General Association of Connecticut made an arrangement to exchange delegates to each other's meetings. In 1794-1795 voting power was given to these delegates. The same arrangement was made with the Congregational Associations of Vermont in 1809, of New Hampshire in 1810 and of Massachusetts in 1811. With this congeniality of the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists the "Plan of Union" was a natural consequence. Basically it permitted Congregational churches formed on the advancing frontier to have Presbyterian pastors, and Presbyterian churches to have Congregational pastors. It provided a scheme whereby churches composed of both Presbyterians and Congregationalists could elect either a session or merely a standing committee according to the majority's wishes. If a committee was to be the ruling body of a particular church, its members could represent their church in the Presbytery in the same way of those churches who send elders. There was no mention of committeemen

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The revivals of the "Second Awakening" which started around 1800 and continued into the 1830's affected and augmented the membership of many churches, among which were primarily the frontier and northern Presbyterian congregations. Whereas the earlier "Great Awakening" characterized by Jonathan Edwards retained the sovereignty of God and the agency of the Word and the Spirit to change man's inward soul and outward piety, the theology of the revivalists of this period emphasized the role of man (his freedom and responsibility) in respect to his conversion and holiness. They readily used "techniques" to provoke hearers "to make a decision."¹

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having to subscribe to the Presbyterian standards. Ibid., pp. 224-225. The "Accommodation Plan of 1808" soon was enacted and extended the co-operating spirit of the former plan. It allowed a Congregational Association to be received as a constituent branch of a Presbyterian synod. Thus Congregationalist ministers became members of the higher Presbyterian courts and Congregationalist committeemen shared with Presbyterian elders the ruling of synods and even the General Assembly. Ibid., p. 404; Smith, Handy & Loetscher, American Christianity, Vol. I, p. 545. Although the majority of these "Presbygational" churches reverted in time completely to Presbyterian polity and contributed to the strength of the Presbyterian Church throughout New York and the Midwest, there were many churches in the 1830's who still used Congregational principles of polity in respect to internal affairs of their local church - mainly in terms of lax inspection and discipline of church officers.

¹Winthrop S. Hudson, Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 59-82, 134-144. Besides the fanatical camp meetings held by frontier revivalists, Charles G. Finney's "new measures" pressured urban people into "conversions" by the tactics of a trial lawyer, the use of an "anxious bench" and the organization of community groups to create the "right atmosphere" for people to save themselves. Cf. Whitney R. Cross, The Burn-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), 1950.

Most of the ministers filling the Presbyterian churches of what became known as the New School area came from New England schools equipped with that region's prevailing Reformed theology, which, although neither Arminian nor emotional, was a departure from the old Calvinistic position once maintained throughout Presbyterian circles. Through the innovating theologies first of Samuel Hopkins and later of Nathaniel W. Taylor, the doctrines of sin, atonement and free agency were made to appear more conducive for revivalistic preaching. When Hopkinianism's "disinterested benevolence" and Taylorism's more radical tenet that "all sin was in sinning"¹ were joined with the revivalist's conversion experience, the new Presbyterian Christian was encouraged to take the initiative to express the depths of his faith with public action - namely, ridding society of its moral evils. Hence most New School Presbyterians were inclined to support actively any benevolent activity regardless of its official connection with or control by the Presbyterian Church (i.e. temperance, abolition, tract, Bible, or prison reform voluntary societies). This, plus the fact that the formation of most of their local churches had resulted from an inter-denominational mission program, advanced the New School's tendency to form and promote national voluntary societies for the education

¹Followers of Hopkins believed that sinning (not sin) can be avoided when self-interest is set aside. Frank H. Foster, A Genetic History of the New England Theology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1907), pp. 129-186, 369-400. Taylor's entire system was never embraced by most New School Presbyterians. Robert H. Nichols, Presbyterianism in New York State: A History of the Synod and Its Predecessors, ed. and completed by James H. Nichols (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 112-113.

and sponsoring of ministers sent into domestic and foreign mission fields.¹

The Old School Presbyterians were concentrated in the mid-Atlantic states and came from a Scottish or Irish background. By contrast they believed in a rigid Presbyterian polity and were by-and-large suspicious of the revivals of the day and particularly of any theologies that did not strictly adhere to Westminster Standards. They felt that all voluntary societies which threatened the unity or purity of their concept of the church should be abandoned. As seen in our preceding chapters, all of these characteristics were held and promoted by Hodge. The majority of the Princeton Review articles written by Hodge between 1829 and 1837 were aimed specifically at attacking New England theological and ecclesiastical principles and defending the Old School against the New School. This was especially true in respect to the American Education Society (formed in 1816) and the American Home Missionary Society (1826), which had gathered strong support from the New School at the expense of the General Assembly's Board of Missions (1816) and Board of Education (1819). Among others, Hodge was quick to point out how the former, not being controlled by the Assembly, could only be destructive of Presbyterianism.

¹It has been pointed out that the popularity of the national voluntary societies which evaded denominational distinctions and controls during the first half of the Nineteenth Century almost created an ecumenical, non-ecclesiastical "Evangelical Empire" in America. Lefferts A. Loetscher, "The Problem of Christian Unity in Early Nineteenth-Century America", Church History, Vol. 32 (March, 1963), pp. 9f.

New School ministers (with their tendency toward speculative theology and philosophical idealism) believed that their theological variations from the Westminster Standards were only minor and were always compatible with a sincere subscription to the general system of the Reformed confessional doctrines. Because some presbyteries were thus lenient in their examination of candidates seeking ministerial communion, the Old School (with their Scottish "common sense" religion) began demanding a more dogmatic and literalistic subscription in order to secure orthodoxy throughout the denomination. Between 1831 and 1836, various New School ministers were accused of heresy. But all those whose trials reached the General Assembly¹ were acquitted mainly because the Assembly was either controlled or heavily influenced by New School Presbyterians.

Outraged by the liberalizing of the church, some militant Old School Presbyterians started drafting manifestos and soliciting signatures as ways of influencing a reform of the church. The "Western Memorial" was the first major petitioning document.² When the 1834 Assembly refused to act upon this memorial, the Old School commissioners at the Assembly drew up the "Act and Testimony" which

¹Albert Barnes and Lyman Beecher were the most notable New School Presbyterians tried for heretical departures from the Westminster standards. Barnes' second trial before the General Assembly in 1836 resulted from doctrines contained in his book, Epistle to the Romans. It is interesting to note that in 1835 Hodge reviewed Barnes' book and pointed out some of the same doctrinal errors that were later used against Barnes. Hodge, "Barnes on the Epistle to the Romans", BRPR (April, 1835), pp. 285-340; Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol. 1834-1837, pp. 268f, 283-291. Cf. Baird, Collection, pp. 694-705.

²This is contained in Baird, Collection, pp. 670-679.

they circulated throughout the denomination for signatures. This document called for all Old School sympathizers to unite in their orthodox testimony against the New School and if need be to withdraw from the church.¹ About 2,163 ministers and elders eventually signed it, but Hodge refused and even wrote articles against it.² As a result Hodge was bitterly attacked by the ultra Old School men and was even threatened with removal from his teaching position.³ Although he basically agreed with the allegations made against the New School in the "Act and Testimony", he and the Princeton faculty believed that the ultimate purpose of the document was to encourage Old School Presbyterians to secede from the General Assembly. As Princeton Theological Seminary was under the Assembly's control, Hodge realized that Old School secession would leave his seminary to New School sympathizers. Princeton's "obstinate refusal to approve the revolutionary measures" of the "Act and Testimony" was soon overcome when in 1836 a deputation from the Old School militants visited the campus and warned them that plans would be made to form another Old School seminary if Princeton would not co-operate. This, plus the New School's opening of Union Theological Seminary in New York City the same year, persuaded Princeton to reconsider its neutral political position in the church.⁴

¹The full document is contained in Ibid., pp. 684-679.

²Hodge, "Act and Testimony", BRPR (October, 1834), pp. 505-522; (January, 1835), pp. 110-134.

³See "Princeton Review and the Act and Testimony", Presbyterian, October 23, 1834 to May 7, 1835 which oppose Hodge's "Act and Testimony" article.

⁴Nichols, Presbyterianism in New York State, p. 129.

Prior to the 1837 meeting of the General Assembly in Philadelphia, an extensive campaign had been waged to encourage presbyteries to send strong Old School delegates. They then gathered at a convention in the same city a week prior to the beginning of the Assembly to map out their strategy and to draw up their "Testimony and Memorial"¹ against the New School. The Southern presbyteries had largely escaped the bitterness of the Old School-New School controversies. Although they were generally interested in the conservative Old School position on theology and polity, they were most sensitive about the slave issue. Theodore Weld, the militant abolitionist leader, was a lobbyist at the 1835 Assembly and had been responsible for influencing certain New School commissioners to bring up the slave question. The Assembly referred this to a committee to report at the 1836 Assembly. During the intervening time abolition sentiments grew rapidly. The South became aroused. Hodge wrote his famous anti-abolitionist article "Slavery" in April of 1836² and outlined the Old School's position for the disturbed Southerners. When the slavery report was made in 1836, the Assembly after a tense and lengthy debate voted to postpone taking any action. There were not enough New School commissioners present who were that zealous about abolition. But many Southerners walked out in protest over the mere fact that the minority abolitionists had threatened their slave system. Before the 1837 General Assembly convened, there seemed to be a gentlemen's

¹The text of this is in Baird, Collection, pp. 710-715.

²See our pp. 245n.

agreement between the leaders of the Old School in the North and the South in order to combine forces and gain control of the Assembly. The former were to aid the latter in cutting off the abolitionists, and the Southern leaders were to unite with the Northern leaders to subdue the New School.¹

When the Assembly opened and the roll was taken, the Old School delegates were delighted to discover that they had a safe majority. Thereupon they enacted what was virtually their "Testimony and Memorial". First, the "Plan of Union of 1801" was abrogated as an unconstitutional act. Second, in consequence of this abrogation the General Assembly declared that the New School Synods of Western Reserve, Utica, Geneva and Genesee, "which were formed and attached to this body under and in execution of said 'Plan of Union', be, and are hereby declared to be, out of the ecclesiastical connection of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America." The Assembly said that this called for "immediate decision" because of

¹Hodge relentlessly claimed that the slave issue had nothing to do with the Old School ascendancy and ensuing actions. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1837), pp. 477f; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), p. 495. However, most historians hold the opposite view. Nichols, Presbyterianism in New York State, pp. 126-133; Lefferts A. Loetscher, The Broadening Church: A Study of the Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), p. 6; Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, pp. 350f, 377-394, 397f. R.J. Breckinridge, the chief author of the "Act and Testimony", a mild, anti-slavery minister, and a commissioner at the 1837 Assembly (at which Hodge was not present), remarked two years later, "in '37, my whole object...was to prevent the orthodox from introducing the question of Slavery at all into the Convention or Assembly of that year. That subject was excluded - the church was saved." Ibid., p. 394. Cf. Minutes of General Assembly, Vol. 1834-1837, pp. 507-508.

the "gross disorders which are ascertained to have prevailed in those Synods." Third, they then listed sixteen doctrinal errors and eight violations of Presbyterian polity, all of which they insinuated were held by most New School churchmen. Finally, after citing the "exceeding injurious" nature of the American Home Missionary Society and of the American Education Society, they recommended that they "cease to operate" within Old School Presbyterian churches. By taking these steps, the Assembly declared that the Presbyterian Church had been reformed and its unity secured.¹

When Hodge wrote his article reviewing these actions of the General Assembly, he wanted to express his dissent over the disowning of the Synods of Utica, Geneva and Genesee because these Synods were not as Congregational in character as the Synod of Western Reserve. But he was overruled by the other directors of the Princeton Review.² However his reluctance to defend the validity of the Old School General Assembly's acts disappeared the next year when the New School, after failing to be admitted to the General Assembly, formed a separate Assembly, calling it the legitimate, constitutional General Assembly of the true historical Presbyterian Church of the United States of America. Hodge was concerned about the New School's suing in the civil courts for possession of certain Assembly properties, which included Princeton, their growth in numbers which threatened to substantiate their claim

¹Ibid., pp. 419-421, 440, 444f, 442, 468-472; for New School "Protests" and Old School "Answers", see Ibid., pp. 449-468, 473-496.

²BRPR: Index Vol., p. 29.

of being the authentic Presbyterian Church, and most of all, their polemics on Presbyterianism.¹ He felt obligated and in fact was personally called upon by some fellow churchmen to defend the Old School's point of view. An elaboration of his 1837 "General Assembly" article is seen in his 1838 and 1839 "General Assembly" articles. These were followed by his acceptance of a request to write his 1839-1840 Constitutional History.

Taking these four works together, we see how Hodge applied his basic principle that any church society, once formed, has the duty, the right and the power to perpetuate itself as it was originally formed.² In the light of the "present controversies in our church", Hodge said that it was necessary "to exhibit the true character of our church, to show on what principles it was founded and governed; in other words, to exhibit historically its constitution, both as to doctrine and order."³

That American Presbyterianism was originally the same with that of Scotland is proved by two incontestable facts; first, that our church adopted identically the same constitution as the Church of Scotland; and secondly, that under that constitution, our highest judicatory claimed and exercised the same powers with the Scottish General Assembly.⁴

On the question of doctrine we have already noted Hodge's personal advocacy of a rigid, almost literal subscription to the Westminster

¹The New School finally lost their suit before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. But their membership by 1839 was 107,736 in comparison to the Old School's 1839 membership of 128,043. Minutes of General Assembly (O.S.), Vol. 1838-1841, p. 274; Presbyterian Reunion: A Memorial Volume 1837-1871 (New York: DeWitt C. Lent & Co., 1870), p. 501.

²See our pp. 225f.

³Hodge, CH, I, pp. iii-iv.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), p. 466.

Confession and Catechisms.¹ In attempting to claim that such had always been the position of American Presbyterians, he began by first contending that all of the early colonial Presbyterian ministers "came from places where Calvinism not only prevailed, but where it was strenuously insisted upon...." Of the ministers of the first Presbytery formed in 1706 all but one were from Scotland or Ireland. Hodge claimed that even up until 1728 only about 25% of the ministers were not of these two countries and that most of these were also rigid Calvinists. Therefore, with few exceptions all Presbyterian ministers in the formative stages of Colonial Presbyterianism must have personally subscribed to the doctrines of the Westminster Standards.² Second, as presbyteries multiplied, their zealous and united concern for orthodoxy led to the Synod's (formed in 1716) passing of the "Adopting Act" in 1729 making it obligatory for all presbyteries to demand of their members or those seeking ministerial communion an explicit subscription to the Westminster Standards. Hodge said that there was a "preliminary act" in the morning session of the Synod, which was followed in the afternoon by the "adopting act itself."³ In explaining the former he was ready to admit that it contained ambiguous language. It said that entering ministers were to assent to the Confession and Catechisms "as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine...." But if any individual had "any

¹See our pp. 229f.

²Hodge, CH, I, pp. 88-100.

³Ibid., p. 187.

scruple with respect to any article or articles", he was to state such at the time of his subscription. If the Presbytery or Synod then judged that his scruple was "only about those articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government", that person was to be admitted to ministerial communion.¹ Hodge admitted that there were a few Presbyterians with a New England background (namely, Jonathan Dickinson) who wanted the Synod to allow an entering minister to subscribe to the Confession and Catechisms only on the terms that they contained "the essential and necessary doctrines of Christianity."² However, he claimed that such a view was never the intention of the Synod when they actually enacted the "Adopting Act" that afternoon. At that session each of the members who had any scruples expressed such. He said that these scruples were all in reference to the portions of the Westminster Standards on the civil magistrates' relationship to the church. He concluded that all other articles must have been adopted in an unqualified sense. He deduced from this that subscription for ministerial communion could only involve a literal rather than a lax interpretation of the Westminster Standards. Hodge claimed that this view was verified by different declarations of the Synod in the following years. For example, in 1736 the Synod made it undisputably clear and obligatory that all ministers must adhere

¹Ibid., pp. 172-173. Cf. Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: The Minutes of the Presbytery of Philadelphia 1706-1716; Minutes of the Synod of Philadelphia 1717-1758; Minutes of the Synod of New York 1745-1758; Minutes of the Synod of Philadelphia and New York 1758-1788 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841), p. 94.

²Hodge, CH, I, pp. 178-181.

"to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Directory, without the least variation or alteration, and without any regard to the distinctions,' in the adopting act (of 1729) between essential and unessential articles."¹ He then went on to claim that all succeeding ecclesiastical acts up through the synodical proceedings leading to the formation of the General Assembly in 1789 further substantiated the fact that the original doctrinal character of Colonial Presbyterianism was the same as the Church of Scotland.²

Hodge claimed that pure Scottish Presbyterian government likewise had always been practiced in the colonial church. Not only did the earliest Presbyterians form themselves into churches, presbyteries and a synod, but the Synod by its "Adopting Act" of 1729 official declared all polity to be in accordance with the Church of Scotland. Hodge contended that this was further proved by the very fact that the Synod made the "Adopting Act" an "obligatory act", that is, "not a mere recommendation, but an authoritative rule." Like the Scottish General Assembly, the Synod possessed the exclusive right to exercise supreme legislative power "to make rules for the discipline and government of the church, and to frame directories." As the highest judicatory at that time, the Synod exercised immediate "review and control" over all lower courts, ministers and members thereby enforcing among all conformity

¹Ibid., pp. 195-196.

²Ibid., II, p. 507.

to its acts, as well as to Westminster polity and doctrine.¹ After 1788, the General Assembly assumed this authoritative position. Hodge seemed to say that anyone who thought that ultimate authority and supreme ecclesiastical powers belonged to any court other than the highest court was not a true Presbyterian, but was more a Congregationalist.

Before expounding how Hodge applied this interpretation of Presbyterianism to defend the Old School 1837 "reforming" acts, we must note two mistakes of which he seems guilty. The first was that he misread the New School's basic premises. They never spoke of subscription in terms of essential and unessential doctrines of the Gospel (Hodge's favorite accusation), and neither did they question whether the Westminster Standards were the church's Confession of Faith and basis for its polity. They merely believed that the American Presbyterianism's policy had always been to allow a person latitude in interpreting and adopting the Confession and that only the Presbytery could judge whether or not an individual's subscription was faithful to the general system of the Confession's doctrines and to Presbyterian government.² Also, the New School did not question the General Assembly's right to improve the welfare and unity of the whole denomination or to act as the supreme judicial

¹Ibid., I, pp. 143-149.

²"The Auburn Declaration" issued by the New School's Convention in August, 1837, to refute the doctrinal errors alleged against them by the Old School in the 1837 General Assembly, gives evidence of the New School's qualified, but cordial, adoption of the Westminster Confession. F.D. Morris, "The Auburn Declaration", The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review (January, 1876), pp. 5-40. Cf. Nichols, Presbyterianism in New York State, pp. 133f.

court of appeal. But they denied that the Assembly's authority and power was original and believed that it should not be centralized to the extent that the presbyteries lost control over their own affairs.

The second mistake that Hodge seems to have made was that he superimposed a Scottish interpretation of government and doctrine upon Colonial Presbyterianism, which in fact had the strong distinctive traditions of having a more qualified subscription and of giving priority to the powers and authority of presbyteries. One New School historian accused Hodge of "torturing" and "arresting" the minutes and proceedings of the Colonial Presbyterian courts "to make them appear to be what they were not, or to obtain an agreement to support a favourite hypothesis or to build up a party."¹ In a less harsh manner, Professor Trinterud reports that some of Hodge's interpretations of historical events are "untenable."² According to Trinterud, the ministers of the first Presbytery as well as their congregations were of mixed character. They had no special affinity to strict Scottish Presbyterianism and in fact, the Presbytery was, by form and action, completely independent of the Church of Scotland. It was not until the large Scottish immigration began in the 1720's

¹William Hill, A History of the Rise, Progress, Genius, and Character of American Presbyterianism: Together with a Review of the "Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America by Charles Hodge" (Washington, D.C.: J. Gideon, Jr., 1839), p. 168.

²Leonard J. Trinterud, The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 326. Trinterud's almost exhaustive work, plus numerous earlier works by church historians, supply a stimulating argument opposing Hodge's biased views of the colonial church and of the formation of the first General Assembly. Charles A. Briggs, American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early History (New York:

that rigid subscriptionists arrived and attempted to introduce their hierarchial ecclesiasticism and unconditional confessionalism. This led to the "Adopting Act" of 1729 which Hodge had called the "preliminary act". This was actually a compromise between the two parties of the church, later to be designated as New Side (revivalists) and Old Side (anti-revivalists). The Westminster Standards were officially adopted, but individual ministers and presbyteries were granted discretion in interpreting them. As the "Great Awakening" gathered strength in the 1730's, the Old Side maneuvered to control the Synod and passed the rigid subscription formula of 1736. This, plus the New Side's view that presbyteries were the true seat of authority, led to the split in 1741 of the Synod into two churches. When they reunited in 1758, the Westminster Standards were again acknowledged, but in terms of a qualified subscription. When the Constitution was drawn up prior to the 1789 formation of the General Assembly, there were several features distinguishing it from Scottish Presbyterianism. Chief among these was the restriction of the powers of the General Assembly by the presbyteries. The Scottish General Assembly was created by Parliament, and the Scottish Church was organized from top down. That is, ultimate authority was vested in and descended from the Assembly. The Assembly made its own laws and rules for the church; it created synods and presbyteries under its authority; and it defined the province and powers of the courts. The Scottish General Assembly retained for itself each and every right

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Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885); Robert E. Thompson, A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895).

of the lower courts. However, in the American Church the Presbytery came first, from which the higher judicatories were formed. All powers not constitutionally designated belonged to the presbyteries. Under the American Constitution, the General Assembly is the agency for unifying the life of the church, but the presbyteries remain the ultimate courts of authority.¹

Hodge's inability to write with an objective historical attitude reflects the extent to which he had committed himself as the defender of Old School sectarianism. Archibald Alexander was grieved over this one-sided history of American Presbyterianism. Hodge admitted his "uneasiness" about Alexander's condemnation, but he found solace in his personal zeal to prove that the true American Presbyterian Church had always been a "genuine daughter of the Church of Scotland, and that the terms of ministerial communion among us have from the beginning, and by the constitution of the Church continue to be, the real belief and honest profession that 'the system of Doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures,' is the one contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms."² At the same time, it was only by attributing to the American General Assembly the same status and powers as the Scottish General Assembly that Hodge could defend the Old School's actions in 1837 and 1838.

Hodge claimed that the General Assembly had supreme legislative, judicial and executive powers which it could exercise over every

¹Trinterud, Forming of an American Tradition, pp. 31f, 48f, 66f, 109f, 148f, 296f, 326, 346.

²LCH, pp. 281-283.

segment of the denomination with pre-emptory and immediate action and with final authority. "The General Assembly, including both synods and presbyteries, might do all that either could do within the whole compass of the church."¹ He wrote, "These powers are but different modes of exercising the general governing authority in the church; and it is often difficult to say whether a particular act should be placed under one or the other of these hands. Still the classification,...is useful."²

Concerning its legislative power, as long as the General Assembly does not violate the laws of the Bible and constitution, it can establish standing laws, policies, procedures and programs and enjoin their observance on its own membership, all lower courts and the people. If a law is proposed which contradicts a specific constitutional law, it must be referred to the presbyteries for their consideration. However, on many things concerning church government which the Constitution does not forbid, the Assembly has full power not merely to advise but to legislate at once. This is especially true of rules which secure conformity of the church to the constitution such as regulations on the reception of foreign ministers and the directives of the 1837 General Assembly. These laws are final unless repealed by a succeeding General Assembly.

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1837), p. 443.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1839), p. 431. Unless otherwise noted, the following analysis of these powers are derived from Hodge's commentary on them in these sources: Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1837), pp. 440-446, 462-464; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), pp. 465-467, 474-477, 483-491; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1839), pp. 431-445. Cf. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), pp. 486-490.

The executive power of the General Assembly involves supervising and controlling all activities of the church. In other words, the Assembly has the power to carry into effect all the Constitutional laws and its own standing laws and programs so as to produce uniformity of the executive acts of the lower courts and to achieve the unity of the church. The Assembly can act immediately on any situation that might threaten the church's purity and unity in respect to doctrine or polity. It can arrest the powers of lower courts; it can dissolve any lower court or congregation and dismiss its ministers and members. The Assembly can refuse to seat in its own body any delegate it judges to be unqualified. Likewise, the Assembly can split existing courts, can erect new churches, presbyteries, synods, boards, or agencies. Executive acts then include everything but the acts of discipline. The abrogation of the "Plan of Union", the dissolving and dismissal of the four synods, the severance of the church's connection with the voluntary societies in preference to its own church boards and the refusal to re-admit delegates from the four synods in 1838 to the Assembly were all actions which the General Assembly was empowered to execute.

The New School questioned the constitutionality of the excising acts and claimed that any alleged executive errors in their judicatories should have been first cited, then tried by the appropriate presbytery and if necessary, carried by appeal up to the General Assembly. Hodge admitted that the judicial power of the General Assembly included its acting as the highest court of appeal

and that its decision in specific cases of discipline was final. However, besides sustaining or removing censures, the Assembly, because of its duty to review and control every action of the church, had two other original rights which entitled it to take immediate judicial action. First, it could judge and inflict ecclesiastical censure on any individual member or minister of the church for immoral or heretical activities. Second, although it does use discipline in terms of censure, the General Assembly may judge the constitutionality of any executive or legislative act of a lower court or a previous Assembly. In both instances the mode in which the Assembly is informed of such evils can be by complaints or common fame as well as appeal and reference. The former of these can be offered by any individual who either has been injured or has knowledge of any irregularity. Without this process, the larger part of the proceedings of lower judicatories would go uncontrolled and would render these courts independent of the rest of the church. Review of the minutes of these courts provides no remedy at all in nine out of ten such instances. Also, the sermons and publications of unorthodox ministers might inflict injury upon segments of the church if their authors are not properly condemned.¹ Citation or trial on the ground of common fame (general, substantiated knowledge), although the most invidious, cumbrous and least effectual method of the correction of errors, is a measure necessary when the existence of heretical or unconstitutional activities are

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1835), pp. 469-471.

of such a serious nature that correction is imperative and immediate in order to maintain the purity and unity of the church society.

Hodge felt that such was the situation when the 1837 General Assembly enacted its reforming laws. The Assembly judged that the 1801 General Assembly's "Plan of Union" was unconstitutional because it allowed Congregational polity to be used in the government of Presbyterian churches and courts.¹ Hodge believed that,

The grand evil, however, attending the plan is, that it breaks down the hedge around our portion of the garden of the Lord, and allows it to be trodden down and wasted. Our system of government, our confession of faith, our whole constitution, are not to be revered for their own sake, nor are they to be treated as of no importance. We value them as means to an end. We believe that truth is necessary to holiness, and that discipline is necessary to the preservation of truth. We have therefore covenanted together to admit no man into the office of teacher or ruler in our church, who does not adopt our system of doctrine, and pledge himself to adhere to our discipline. It is a gross violation of contract, therefore, for any presbytery to admit as minister or elder any man who does not sincerely adopt our standards.²

Hodge asserted that anyone willing to submit to "the decision of the enlightened consciences of all good men," must admit that the church has the "right to self-government, and (the right to) refuse to be governed by men who will not submit to the system they administer."³

Hodge reasoned that when the General Assembly judged the unconstitutionality of the "Plan of Union" and declared it null ab

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1837), pp. 426f.

²Ibid., p. 432.

³Ibid., p. 460.

initio, it also used its judicial power to decide which judicatories had been formed under this plan. It is "a general fact, a matter of historical notoriety" that the majority of the churches within these synods were organized according to the "Plan of Union" and continue to be not completely Presbyterian in their government or doctrine.¹ Therefore they are unconstitutional bodies which "have no more right to a standing in our church than a state with a monarchical form of Government has a right to a standing in our national Union."² The Assembly's disowning of these synods and their courts and membership is no act of discipline in that it does not involve censure and it deprives no man of his ministerial or Christian standing in the visible Church catholic. However the Assembly, exercising its legislative, executive and judicial powers in these ways, "relieves us from a source of error and disorder which is distracting the peace, and destroying the purity of the church."³

Hodge claimed that the acts of the General Assemblies of 1837 and 1838 did not establish "a new test of orthodoxy and ecclesiastical communion" but only designated what has always been the true Presbyterian Church. These acts only declared that if a presbytery was willing to adhere to the Presbyterian Church upon the basis of the 1837-1838 acts the General Assembly would acknowledge their delegates and them as constituent parts of the church.⁴ Thus Hodge

¹Ibid., pp. 454f, 465f, 470.

²Ibid., p. 464.

³Ibid., p. 467.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), pp. 502-503. Our underlining.

on the one hand was allowing for re-admission of New School presbyteries if they strictly subscribed to the Westminster system of doctrine and conformed to his concept of Presbyterian polity. But on the other hand he was admitting that the unity of his church society virtually depended on the General Assembly maintaining its hierarchical position.

This had not been his view prior to the split. In 1835 he contended that "presbyteries are the true fountain of all ecclesiastical power." On judging the qualification of members of presbytery he insisted that one could not argue, "because the church is one, therefore the several parts or separate presbyteries have no right to judge in this matter for themselves." Their union to form the church is "by compact" and "to insist that the union was such as to destroy the separate existence and unconceded rights of the constituent parts of the body, is to maintain that the church is consolidated, and to establish a complete spiritual despotism."¹ However in 1838 Hodge emphasized that the General Assembly had the supreme power and right to judge and control the Presbytery's acts of determining who were its own qualified members. As a denomination the church cannot be an "aggregate of a number of independent presbyteries." The Assembly must have the power to enforce the constitution, either to discipline or to dismiss any minister, and to disown any presbytery that seriously violates the standards of the church.²

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1835), pp. 464-465.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1838), pp. 485f.

The primary reason for this shift seems to be due to the circumstances which forced upon Hodge the task of rationalizing the Old School actions in order to secure what he thought to be the true Presbyterian faith. On various occasions he had written caustic strictures against the theology of the New School. He claimed that "as a body", they were "notoriously the lax party as to doctrine," which was a "natural effect" of their "disregard of the constitutional rules" or laxity in polity.¹ Thus, to preserve scholastic Calvinistic orthodoxy required strict government and discipline which in turn demanded a strong authoritative tribunal which supervised and controlled the whole church society. In effect then Hodge's high ecclesiasticism was expedient. But more than this, it was necessary because he thought that the teaching mission of the Old School Church was primarily one of confessional polemics. As we shall see shortly, this view led Hodge to defend sectarianism.

The North-South Splits of 1861 and 1866 in the Old School Presbyterian Church

In the 1840's when it was settled that there would be two Presbyterian denominations in America, the Old School Church began to enjoy a certain degree of peace and unity. Its centralized government held a tight rein on faith and order. Hodge emerged as the foremost polemicist for his church, defending its conservative positions against both the New School Church and the more speculative New England theologians. However, he was also ready to criticize

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1837), pp. 433-434, 465-466.

the activities of his own church especially the operations of the General Assembly whenever he felt that departures had been made from the church standards.

Hodge was in total opposition to the splits of the church in both 1861 and 1866, yet the logic of his polity sanctioned such disruptions. He asserted that "the mind of the Church" has "an authority paramount to the private preferences or opinions of individuals."¹ In answering what is the primary way to ascertain that mind or will which commands the allegiance of every member, Hodge wrote the following:

To us the General Assembly is the organ for expressing the will of our whole Church, and if any man refuses to regard the decision of the Assembly as the voice of the Church, he must show good reason for so refusing. It, no doubt, often happens that the acts of the Assembly are hasty, inconsiderate, and erroneous - not expressing the deliberate judgment even of the members present, much less of the whole Church. We are very far from saying that every decision of the Assembly is to be regarded as expressing the voice of the Church; but such decision is prima facie evidence of what the mind of the Church is; and if it is to be contested it must be for reasons given.²

The following seems to be Hodge's line of reasoning setting out the tension between the acts of the General Assembly and the acts of individuals.³ The General Assembly's deliverances and acts which either enforce the Constitution or testify to any point of Christian truth and duty are authoritative, but not infallible. It is up to every individual to judge for himself the truth or propriety of these decisions and acts. If he feels that they disagree with

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1853), p. 520.

²Ibid., p. 519.

³These points are deduced from the following sources: Hodge "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1865), pp. 506-507; "The Princeton Review and the State of the Country and of the Church", BRPR (October, 1865), pp. 647-651; "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), pp. 485-494.

the Bible or the Constitution, he may dissent on the grounds of conscience. In other words, if he or a lower court is of the opinion that the Assembly's actions attempt to bind the conscience beyond the Biblical and Constitutional laws, they may protest. If the Assembly does not reverse its stand, the dissenting party still does not have to assent to the correctness of the Assembly's judgment. But he must acquiesce to that body's decision or act itself. That is, the party must not deliberately resist or disobey the decrees so as to disturb the peace and unity of the church. If an individual disobeys and is arraigned for such disobedience, any court including the General Assembly may censure him because his disobedience has become a judicial matter. If a complaint is made against a lower court's disobedience, the General Assembly has the right to dissolve the court, to dismiss its members, and to refuse to seat its would-be delegates. The disobedient party then must meekly submit to the appropriate infliction or leave the church. If the Assembly's actions are in fact wrong (not within the limits of Biblical and Constitutional laws), the dissenting party with a free conscience may disregard them. But in practical terms, if he stays in the church he must submit to the judicial decision and wait for the Assembly to reverse its testimony or lift its injunction. If he has withdrawn, been dismissed or excommunicated, or if as a court it has been dissolved, the party can do either of two things: 1) seek re-admission by adhering to the acts and submitting to the legitimate authority of the General Assembly, or 2) form or join another church.

If we apply the above views to the explosive events surrounding

the Civil War, it is understandable why the Old School Church split twice in the 1860's. In April, 1861, Hodge advised the delegates going to the May General Assembly that in order to preserve the unity of the church they should keep in mind the Constitution's terms of communion. This in effect meant that the Assembly had no authority to make a declaration of political allegiance.¹ When the Assembly passed the "Spring Resolution", Hodge protested but acquiesced. The Southern Presbyterians would have seceded from the church anyway, but the interesting point is that they defended their action by pointing out that the General Assembly's testimony was contrary to Biblical and Constitutional laws. If they had stayed within the church, their dissent would have inevitably led to their threatening the peace and unity of the church, their being arraigned for disobedience, and their punishment or withdrawal.

Hodge also felt that the injunctions of the 1865 General Assembly went beyond the Constitution and were merely the emotional declaration of a casual majority. However, the "Declaration and Testimony" men took this and the Assembly's decisions during the war as the mind of the church in which they could no longer silently acquiesce. Again Hodge's polity sanctioned the 1866 General Assembly's right to dissolve Louisville Presbytery and to dismiss the signers of the "Declaration and Testimony". On the other hand, he re-asserted the right of conscientious dissent, which in this case he believed to be exercised without sufficient cause

¹Hodge, "The Church and the Country", BRPR (April, 1861), pp. 375-376. For Hodge's personal role in moral-political teaching of the church, see our pp.282f.

and thus with a schismatical spirit. "We, as Presbyterians, are required to profess and teach nothing but what is contained in our doctrinal standards, and we are required to do nothing but to conform to the form of government and discipline which we have voluntarily adopted."¹ He claimed that this was all the General Assembly was demanding of the dissenters if they wished to be retained in or readmitted to the church. However, the actual intention of the Assembly was more than this and the signers and sympathizers of the "Declaration and Testimony" knew this. They realized that the General Assembly always had the paramount authority and power to determine what acts were within the Biblical and Constitutional laws, and that implicit in the Assembly's action of 1866 was the design to bring the whole church into agreement and conformity with the basic principles of the testimonies and orders of the preceding General Assemblies. On the grounds of conscience large numbers of Presbyterians in the border states withdrew from the Old School Church, because they judged that they were no longer in agreement with or willing to submit to the decisions and measures of the General Assembly.

Hodge deplored both these splits because he thought that they were unjustifiable and the result of unbiblical and unconstitutional acts, namely creating new terms of communion. It seems that he believed that the Bible and the Constitution had self-evident laws and that all true Presbyterians who rationally approached these laws would invariably agree as to their interpretation and application.

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), p. 493.

However, the sincerity or faithfulness by which members or ministers adopted and adhered to the church's standards must ultimately be in the hands of the General Assembly. This body alone could preserve the purity, the peace and the unity of the denomination. Thus, for Hodge, the primary reason why the Assembly did not preserve the unity was the irrationality of the times. He took most seriously and courageously the task of pointing out the errors made by both the General Assemblies and those individuals who seceded. Nevertheless, despite his claims for the supreme authority of the General Assembly, whenever there was a serious conflict between the authority of conscience and the authority of a church society the conscience had precedence. The conflict between these two is one of the ways he accounted for the divisions in and the separations of church societies.

The Reunion of Old School and New School in 1869

As the years passed, Hodge's life became so identified with Old School Presbyterianism that he was willing to accept denominationalism and especially his sect as a necessary, established fact in the world. His son wrote, "He (Hodge) believed that under the present condition of the universal Church, each Denomination has its special gift and intrusted function, and that the gift and function of the Old School Presbyterian Church was one of the most precious and indispensable, and one which no other could fulfill....Its special function (was that of) maintaining intact by testimony and by discipline, the strict old Calvinism of our Fathers, and of the Westminster

Confession, strictly interpreted."¹ With this belief it can be easily understood what role he was to take during the reunion movement of the 1860's.

From 1838 until 1862 the Old School and New School Assemblies made no attempt to have official intercourse, even though each had maintained standing relations with other churches less closely related. Animosities were kept alive by denominational periodicals and by conflicts arising from joint occupation of the same domestic mission fields. However when the Civil War broke out, it indirectly aided in reducing some of the tensions and differences between the Old School and New School. With the secession of the Southern Presbyterians in 1861 the Old School lost a large portion of its theologically and socially most conservative members. As the War progressed, the Old School's stand on moral and political issues (especially slavery) began to resemble more closely that of the New School. Doctrinal differences were pushed into the background as Northern Presbyterians found it a practical necessity to work together during wartime.

In 1862 three Old School presbyteries overtured the General Assembly to take steps for a reunion with the New School. When the Assembly decided that it was "inexpedient" to consider such a proposal, Hodge wrote, "We are rejoiced at this disposition of the matter, as we are persuaded that the peace and purity of the church would suffer by any attempt to unite the two bodies."² Nevertheless,

¹LCH, p. 503.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1862), p. 497.

he was not opposed to the action that the Assembly did take. They passed a resolution proposing to the New School that they have official interchange of corresponding delegates between the two General Assemblies. Hodge and others thought of this as a flank movement to defeat reunion. This would establish a friendly relationship between the two distinct denominations but would allow them to continue their independent existence. However when the New School accepted the proposal in 1863, the spirit for reunion began to gain momentum.

The 1864 New School Assembly meeting in Dayton, Ohio was opened by a sermon entitled "Christian Union and Ecclesiastical Reunion", preached by its retiring moderator, Henry B. Smith.¹ Smith advocated that reunion was possible if some of the minor differences between the two churches were resolved. As Chairman of the Committee on Church Polity, he presented a proposal to his Assembly which was unanimously approved. This declaration of their desire for "full and cordial reunion" was sent to the Old School Assembly which was meeting at the same time in Newark, New Jersey.² The Old School Assembly rejected the proposal. A group of 70 ministers and 53 elders who were attending the Old School

¹Henry B. Smith, "Christian Union and Ecclesiastical Reunion", Faith and Philosophy: Discourses and Essays by Henry B. Smith, ed. George L. Prentiss (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1878), pp. 265-296. Smith, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was the leading New School theologian of this period. His sermon was later printed and widely circulated throughout both denominations. His influence as a powerful ecclesiastical statesman eventually won him the recognition as "the hero of Reunion". Lewis F. Sterns, Henry Boynton Smith (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1892), p. 282.

²Sterns, H.B. Smith, pp. 290-291.

Assembly met together to discuss the expediency and feasibility of organic union and declared their belief that both denominations were in agreement on doctrine and polity.¹

In reviewing his Assembly Hodge again exclaimed his joy over the Assembly's action and said, "In order to justify or demand the union of believers in the same organized body, there should be such agreement in doctrines, worship and discipline (or order) as will admit of their acting together in harmony, and effectively." Contrary to the group of ministers and elders, he believed that such an agreement did not exist and therefore "that immediate general union would probably produce much more evil than good."²

It is not necessary for us to rehearse the details of the events that followed and those which led to the reunion in 1869 in order to see Hodge's continuous and persistent opposition. The two basic charges he leveled against the New School were again those centered on polity and doctrine. He offered the same arguments that he had used in defending the church's split in 1837-1838. When his own Assembly set up a joint committee with the New School to give serious consideration to reunion, he lamented "the fact that

¹Presbyterian Reunion: Memorial Vol., pp. 250-251.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1864), pp. 537-538. It is interesting to note that Hodge and a few others were actually hoping that the Southern Presbyterians instead of the New School would be reunited with the Old School Church. Such a union would have been theologically harmonious and would have augmented the conservative forces in the Old School Church. However, during the period of Reconstruction, the Southerners with their radical provincialism and the Northerners with their radical political policies grew even further apart and made such a reunion impossible.

the separation between the Old and New-school occurred nearly 30 years ago; and consequently, a great part of our younger brethren are ignorant of its causes and necessity, and are, therefore, not prepared to estimate the gravity of the interests at stake."¹

In numerous writings he repeated what he thought were the continuing distinguishing features of Old School and New School Presbyterianism. He contended that the New School was still somewhat congregational and lax in its church polity.²

Can any Old-school man with a good conscience, and a proper sense of his obligation to the constitution, consent to a reunion which shall allow Congregationalists who do not adopt our standards either of doctrine or discipline to be constituent members of our church courts. We do not think that this is a matter that admits of debate.³

Hodge thought that it was "morally wrong" to allow a congregational element to exist under the Presbyterian government and that if reunion occurred, the New School branch would "resist, in many cases, the exercise of powers which Old-school men believe to belong, by Divine right, to the courts of the church, and especially to the General Assembly."⁴

However, Smith and other New School men admitted that in the beginning their church "attempted unreal compromises and adjustments" in polity. They pointed out that the New School had abandoned

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1866), p. 497.

²Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), p. 301.

³Ibid. Cf. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1865), p. 491.

⁴Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1867), p. 521; "The Protest and Answer", BRPR (July, 1868), p. 460.

voluntary societies in favor of church boards, and they proposed that all congregations and church officers should conform to "the Presbyterian system of church order as distinguished from other systems." But they did believe that the reunited Assembly ought to have "more strictly the character of a court of appeals."¹

Hodge felt that the real and acute difference which continued to separate the two churches was that the Old School strictly adhered to the Reformed Confessional standards and that the New School did not "and never have required the adoption of that system as the condition of admission to their ministry." Hodge said that in effect all that the New School required of their ministers was adoption of the Confession's "articles or doctrines essential to Christianity." He thought that the Old School could never "consent to what they believe to be immoral and destructive" - that is, allowing unorthodox and especially Arminian doctrines to be taught in their church.²

A few months after Hodge had made these remarks, Smith wrote, "In all the heat of the fierce controversies, thirty years ago, no more reckless or distorted representations of the New School positions were ever penned than have just appeared in the 'Princeton Review'." Smith then defended the Reformed orthodoxy of the New School by showing how they adhered to the Westminster Confession and opposed all the Arminian doctrines that Hodge had accused some

¹Smith, "Christian Union and Ecclesiastical Reunion", pp. 278, 282f, 288-292.

²Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1867), pp. 514-515.

of them of teaching.¹ In his 1864 sermon he had said that any reunion of the two churches should be made

simply on the basis of the standards, which we equally accept, without private interpretation; interpreted in their legitimate grammatical and historic sense, in the spirit of the original Adopting Act, and as 'containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.' My liberty here is not to be judged of another man's conscience. Any other view not only puts, for all practical purposes, the Confession above the Scriptures, but also puts somebody's theological system above the confession.²

Hodge and others were using their strict scholastic Calvinism to interpret the Confession and were demanding that interpretation as the essential condition for reunion. In 1868 he said that it appeared from the

official documents that the New-school as a party and as a church has avowedly contended for a greater latitude in the adoption of the Confession of Faith than the Old-school was willing to concede. The prominent distinction between the two bodies has ever been that the one is strict, and the other 'liberal' in its requirements as to matters of doctrine.³

Later that same year the General Assembly considered the terms of union which both churches were to send to their respective presbyteries for approval. The first term of union as proposed by the churches' joint committee was as follows:

The Reunion shall be effected on the doctrinal and ecclesiastical basis of our common standards; the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments shall be acknowledged to be the inspired word of God, and the only infallible rule of

¹Smith, "Presbyterian Reunion", American Presbyterian and Theological Review (October, 1867), pp. 634, 644f.

²Smith, "Christian Union and Ecclesiastical Reunion", p. 278. Smith thought that the 1729 Adopting Act sanctioned a qualified subscription.

³Hodge, "Presbyterian Re-union", BRPR (January, 1868), p. 59.

faith and practice: the Confession of Faith shall continue to be sincerely received and adopted, "as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures;" it being understood, that this Confession is received in its proper, historical - that is, the Calvinistic or Reformed - sense; it is also understood, that various methods of viewing, stating, explaining, and illustrating, the doctrines of the Confession, which do not impair the integrity of the Reformed or Calvinistic system, are to be freely allowed in the United Church, as they have hitherto been allowed in the separate Churches; and the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States shall be approved as containing the principles and rule of our polity.¹

Hodge and 57 others protested against the second qualifying clause of the subscription to the Confession. They outlined eight non-Calvinistic doctrines which they claimed that the New School had always allowed. They contended that the doctrinal integrity of the Presbyterian Church would automatically be destroyed if the reunited church considered these doctrines as being consistent with the Confession's system of doctrines.²

In answer to their protest, the Assembly said that these eight "errors" had been formally denounced by the New School in the Auburn Declaration of 1837. The Assembly regarded this declaration as "an authoritative statement of the New-school type of Calvinism, and as indicating how far they desire to go, and how much liberty they wish in regard to what the terms of union call 'the various modes of explaining, illustrating and stating' the Calvinistic

¹Minutes of the General Assembly (O.S.), Vol. 1867-1869, p. 672. Our underlining points out the two clauses defining the confessional subscription.

²Ibid., pp. 658f. It is interesting to note that these doctrinal errors were virtually those which the General Assembly in 1837 accused the New School of committing. Cf. Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol. 1834-1837, pp. 468-469.

faith."¹ The fact that the 1868 Old School Assembly could accept the Auburn Declaration when the previous Assemblies did not shows the keenness with which most churchmen desired reunion.

Hodge exclaimed that it did not make any difference how orthodox the Auburn Declaration was because the question was not, "What the New-school believe or profess? but, What do they tolerate?" Hodge declared, "It is a fact, beyond all dispute, that the errors specified in the protest are taught without let or hinderance in the New-school body; and if, as they understand them, the proposed terms of union bind us to tolerate all the forms of doctrine which they tolerate, they bind us to tolerate those errors."²

When all the debating was over, the two Assemblies finally decided that the two qualifying clauses on subscription to the Confession should be dropped. Their respective presbyteries were then asked to approve the Plan of Reunion as thus amended. Hodge was still not fully satisfied that the New School would adhere sincerely to the Confession with an Old School interpretation. In a last desperate attempt to convince his church to reject reunion, he said that the "salvation of men and the purity of the Gospel, in a great measure, depend on the official teachers of the church, being required to believe, profess, and inculcate those great (Calvinistic) truths. It is not enough that they should be included in the recognized standard of doctrine." He then repeated his accusation that the New School was liberal and ordained men

¹Minutes of the General Assembly (O.S.), Vol. 1867-1869, p. 663.

²Hodge, "Protest and Answer", BRPR (July, 1868), pp. 474-475.

"whom the Old School could not conscientiously receive into the ministry." It is "universally admitted," claimed Hodge, that the New School "tolerates forms of doctrine which the Old School have repeatedly and officially declared to be, in its judgment, inconsistent with the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Confession." Hodge summed up his argument by saying that the Old School presbyteries should vote against the reunion

because we regard the strictness in interpreting the standards for which the Old School have always contended to be the 'ark of the covenant' committed to our trust, which we are bound to preserve, and on the preservation of which our safety and usefulness as a church ultimately depend; and because we consider that principle to be endangered by consenting to the union, when those with whom we unite, and the public generally (so far as we can judge), consider that we surrender our palladium.¹

A.A. Hodge reported that his father,

after the majority of his most thorough sympathizers, seeing the event inevitable, had capitulated in order to secure the most favorable conditions possible, he wavered not a hair's breadth, but rode nine miles to meet the Presbytery in Cranberry, on October 5th, 1869, with the 'anthrax malitiosissimus' on the back of his neck, for the purpose of casting his final vote against it.²

The final vote of the Old School presbyteries was 128 affirmative and only three negative. All of the 113 New School presbyteries voted in the affirmative and 110 did so unanimously. The two Assemblies met separately in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in November, 1869. After each Assembly voted to make the reunion official, they adjourned for the last time as separate bodies.³

¹Hodge, "The New Basis of Union", BRPR (July, 1869), pp. 464-466.

²LCH, p. 504.

³Presbyterian Reunion: Memorial Vol., pp. 374f, 354, 410.

Although Hodge acquiesced in his church's decision to reunite, he became less actively involved in ecclesiastical affairs. He was now merely the theologian of one party and his theology was no longer considered the interpretation of the church's standards. It was at this time that he vigorously concentrated his efforts on publishing his magnum opus, his three-volume Systematic Theology.

Sectarianism and Church Union

It is obvious that Hodge would have preferred the continuation of the Old School Presbyterian Church as a denomination with a special identity separate from all other church societies. His whole concept of the church as a visible community was geared to men's capabilities of agreeing to the same propositional truths so as to be harmonious in carrying out their religious duties. He felt that such would not be the case if his church organically united with another denomination (i.e. the New School). In other words, he was defending sectarianism.

When some American Presbyterians insisted "that the visible church ought to be one organization, that the seamless robe of Christ ought not to be rent; that sects are a great evil and a great wrong," Hodge said, "All this may be readily admitted....If all Christians were really one - one in faith, one in their intellectual knowledge of the Scriptures, one in spirit, then they might be, and should be, externally one." However, Hodge contended that this was describing the "ideal state of the church" and did not have an application to "the actual condition of things."¹ Because Christians

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1867), pp. 503-504.

were imperfect not only in their faith and knowledge but in their spiritual unity, they had different views of doctrine and order. Hodge felt that it was therefore impossible for them to be in the same ecclesiastical organization.

Under such circumstances it is better that they should separate. Two can not walk together unless they be agreed. External union is the product and expression of internal unity. The former should not be pressed beyond the latter. One of the greatest evils in the history of the Church has been the constantly recurring effort to keep men united externally who were inwardly at variance. All forced unions are to be deprecated. They lead on the one hand to hypocrisy, and on the other to persecution. We may lament over such differences and endeavor to remove them, but as long as they exist they can not be wisely ignored. In the present state of the world denominational churches are therefore relatively a good.¹

Although Hodge seemed to accept the permanent condition of professing Christians being divided into sects, he did not believe that their churches should be so narrow as to refuse recognition of and all relationships with other churches. To diminish the evils of external separation, he proposed five duties to be performed by the denominations in relation to each other.²

1. Denominations have the duty of "mutual recognition" or "mutual respect". They should acknowledge members of other churches as Christian brethren and all denominations as Christian churches

¹Hodge, "The Unity of the Church Based on Personal Union with Christ", History, Essays, Orations, and Other Documents of the Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Alliance, eds. Philip Schaff and S. Irenaeus Prime (London: Sampson Low, Maristons, Low, and Searle, 1874), p. 143.

²Unless otherwise designated, Hodge's description of these duties are taken from these sources: Ibid., pp. 143-144; Hodge "Principles of Church Union, . . .", BRPR (July, 1865), pp. 283-288; "The Unity of the Church", MS H6624u at P.T.S.; "Unity of the Church", MS H6624by at P.T.S.

regardless of their mode of organization or worship, or even if their doctrinal testimony on things not essential to salvation is different. "It is hard to see how, on Scriptural principles, we can deny a body of believers, in their collective capacity, to be a church, whose members as individuals we are forced to regard as true Christians."¹

2. Denominational churches should allow "intercommunion" whereby each permits members of another church to commune with them in public worship (including the sacraments). Also they should be willing to accept into their membership any member of another church. "If a church is so unfaithful as to admit to its fellowship those whom the law of Christ requires should be excluded, other churches are not bound to receive them into fellowship." But no particular church has "the right to require anything as a term of communion which Christ has not made a condition of salvation."

3. Another duty of denominations is the recognition of the rights of other churches to discipline and to ordain and of the validity of their sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. This does not mean that they necessarily accept the justice of particular acts of discipline or the mode of ordination and the administration of the sacraments. Neither does it mean that such acts or ministers should be accepted in one's own church. This simply means that

¹It should be remembered that in opposition to the 1845 Old School General Assembly, Hodge argued that the Roman Catholic Church should be recognized as a Christian Church, because its creeds contained enough truth to save the soul and some of its members bore the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1845), pp. 462-465; "Is the Church of Rome a part of the Visible Church?", BRPR (April, 1846), pp. 338-342.

churches should acknowledge that any organized group of professing Christians have a right to all the privileges and prerogatives belonging to them.

4. Denominations that recognize each other as Christian churches should practice "non-interference". They should not try "to proselyte men from one denomination of Christians to another." Neither should they intrude into the appropriate field of another so as to jointly occupy a community whose population is barely sufficient to support one church.

5. Finally, denominations have the duty of "co-operation" and the cultivation of peace. They should "avoid all the causes of alienation and ill-feeling." Instead they should combine their efforts "to promote Christian love and fellowship" and to "present an undivided front against infidelity, and every form of Antichristian error."

In addition to these five duties Hodge favored two practical ways in which denominations could manifest their Christian unity in the midst of their diversities. First, there should be "friendly intercourse kept up by an interchange of delegates between independent evangelical bodies." These remarks of Hodge were made in 1840 when the General Assembly decided to renew their ecclesiastical correspondence with the General Conference of Maine. Hodge said, "We have suffered from too intimate union." However so long as "our doctrine and discipline are secure" and "we do not admit to a participation in the government of the church those who do not adopt our standards and submit to the government which they help to

administer," the church ought to exchange corresponding delegates with other denominations. He then exclaimed that this would be "a testimony before the world of union in all the essential principles of the gospel." It answers "the cavils of papists and infidels arising from the dissensions or sects of Protestants" by promoting brotherhood and true religion. Moreover it helps "to remove prejudices" and "to diffuse correct information between the different evangelical sects."¹ It is significant that Hodge did not mention the matter of interchanging delegates with the New School until 1862. Evidently he felt that there was too much friction to implement such an exchange. Also it is noteworthy that this ecclesiastical correspondence did not include the Roman Catholics but was a reaction against them.

Second, when some Christians started promoting a "federation" of evangelical denominations, Hodge admitted that this could be "a healthy movement" as it would promote closer union of Christians and greater co-operation, efficiency and economy among different churches' missionary and benevolent operations. "When the diversity between denominational churches is clear and avowed, nothing more than a federal union, which shall leave each in the possession and avowal of its peculiar faith and order, is possible."² This was what he had hoped would be the arrangement between the Old School and New School churches. A Presbyterian National Union Convention

¹Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1840), pp. 413-414.

²Hodge, Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), pp. 271-274.

was organized to be held in Philadelphia during November, 1867. Representatives of six Reformed American denominations attended. Hodge, a member of the Convention, was impressed with the congenial spirit of those attending. But he remained virtually silent throughout the proceedings which centered around "the organic union of all Presbyterian churches in the land." He said that he had come to the Convention "under an entire misapprehension." He thought "that some plan of federal union, which would allow each member of the confederation to retain its own peculiarities, and revolve in its own sphere, might be proposed and recommended."¹

It is probable that Hodge would not have objected to the organic union of all evangelical churches as long as they conformed to Old School Presbyterianism. However, he realized that such would not have been a real possibility without either compromising his concepts of doctrine and polity or introducing the elements of hypocrisy and disharmony into his church. Therefore, he thought it best for ecclesiastical societies to remain autonomous and to perpetuate their own religion.² He also realized that such a view contributed

¹Presbyterian Reunion: Memorial Vol., p. 264. Hodge's underlining.

²Hodge thought that a church's missionary program must be sectarian due to practical necessity. When some claimed that missionaries ought to be anti-sectarian and should teach the essentials of Christianity without imposing the peculiarities of their sect, Hodge replied, "What is Presbyterian religion according to our belief and solemn profession, but the truth of God, truth in order to goodness? We should be of all men the most besotted, if, with this belief, we did not desire to promote it to the ends of the earth. If then, we are to have Christian union, we must have separate organization and separate action. This anti-sectarian spirit is a mere monomania, which may serve well enough to inspire an essay or a sermon, but should have no influence on the deliberations of a grave ecclesiastical assembly." Hodge, "General Assembly", BRPR (July, 1836), p. 432.

to the proliferation of sects. But he was willing to accept this as a condition of man's imperfect knowledge and thus diversity of opinion.¹ He escaped giving serious consideration to organic church union by saying, "One must remember that real unity is inward and by the Spirit."² Because individuals (if they are true Christians) are spiritually united, there is no absolute necessity for the societies which they form to be visibly united. It was most significant then that the theme of his address to the 1873 General Conference of the Evangelical Alliance held in New York should be, "The Unity of the Church based on Personal Union with Christ".

¹Hodge, "Principles of Church Union,...", BRPR (April, 1865), pp. 279-281.

²Hodge, "The Unity of the Church", MS H6624u at P.T.S. Cf. Hodge, "Unity of the Church", MS H6624by at P.T.S.

Chapter VII Concluding Critical Assessment

Throughout this study of Hodge it has been pointed out that many of his ecclesiastical doctrines are inconsistent and almost contradictory. These inconsistencies reflect a basic inadequacy in his Christology and his doctrine of God. This inadequacy is a failure to reconcile the doctrines of scholastic Calvinism in which he was trained with a certain pragmatic and indeed anthropocentric approach to the central problems of theology.

First, the basic doctrine at the foundation of Hodge's thought was the sovereignty of God. With this he promulgated a speculative predestinarianism, an intertrinitarian contract or covenant of redemption, a metaphysical forensic imputation of righteousness, and an unmediated regenerating and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. The formal cause of all things (spiritual or temporal) is God. Theoretically man should resign himself to the divine decrees and providential arrangements of God and consider himself blessed if these are in his favor. However, Hodge was at the same time anthropocentrically oriented to the point that man's role was determinative for his salvation and morality. If an individual had true faith and sincere piety, his election and partnership in the covenant of grace was secured. Thus grace was conditioned by man's knowledge and acceptance of saving truths and by his corresponding obedience which increased his holiness.

Second, Hodge believed that the doctrinal plan of salvation

and the moral precepts of God were infallibly contained in the Bible and that by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, man could spiritually discern who God is and His will for his life. However, he also held that man apart from special revelation or by natural revelation could know God sufficiently so as to recognize Him as Creator, Moral Governor, and the God who demands justice for man's guilty, polluted nature and actions. Thus man in a sense acknowledges God as God and by his innate sense of justice can perform moral duties in line with God's providential ruling of society. At the same time, Hodge believed that it was theoretically possible for the Holy Spirit to implant the essential truths of salvation into the mind of any elected individual not cognizant of the revealed Word of God, although of course these truths would not conflict with those contained in Scripture.

Third, Hodge saw that the grace of God was that to which man owed all of his spiritual life, both his redemption and the fruits of his piety. Yet he also placed nature prior to grace and election prior to redemption which itself was separated from creation. Hence, there are parts of man's nature and portions of creation which are unaffected by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, Hodge taught that Jesus Christ was the Son of God through whose atoning death divine justice was satisfied and all the benefits necessary for salvation are made available to His elected inheritance. Yet he also contended that man must have a saving interest in Jesus Christ as the object of his faith before he could

appropriate the blessings of Christ - that is, prior to his being accounted as righteous and becoming a subject of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Hodge's dualism as expressed by these conflicting views arose mainly because his theology was not Christocentric. The starting point of Christian theology is Jesus Christ rather than an abstract idea of a sovereign God who can be known behind the back of Jesus Christ. Neither should one think of Christ as a partner to some abstruse covenant of redemption formed in eternity between a vindictive Father and an appeasing Son. Instead Jesus Christ is the full revelation of the sovereign God come to earth in the form of a Servant to redeem all mankind and creation. Christ is the agent and substance of man's election and not the object of faith through which saints may realize their election by believing He died only for them. Jesus Christ is the Elect One of God. Our election is only by our incorporation in Him. He first became one with us assuming our fallen humanity and sanctifying it in his Person, so that His righteousness replaces our unrighteousness and His self-sanctification becomes the accomplished fact or ground of our sanctification. Our faith and holiness have no reality unless we participate in the faithfulness and holiness of Christ. We are redeemed not only through the work of Christ but in the very Person of Christ, His Life, Death and Resurrection. There is no conditional grace.

This awareness of the Person and Work of Christ as supplying the starting point and the norm for all theological doctrines is

however missing in Hodge. Nevin was most aware of this and once remarked that with

Hodge's idea of the Incarnation, we are to conceive of a Nestorian Christ let down like the sheet of Peter's vision and after received again into heaven, all things continuing as before. The world, 'left behind by the transient apparition, pursues precisely its old course, including in its living stream nothing more than has belonged to it from the beginning.¹

In the absence of a central and normative doctrine of Christ Hodge oscillates between the divine decree and man's natural and spiritual capacities as the basis for his theology. This is particularly apparent in his doctrine of the Church.

We have seen in Hodge's ecclesiology a sharp dualism between the invisible and visible Church. On the one hand, the invisible Church derives its existence from an abstract divine decree. Its character is defined by the character of its membership and not by Jesus Christ. Its life revolves around an arbitrary regenerating and sanctifying indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Its unity is internal, spiritual, and not visible to the world.

But on the other hand, he saw the visible Church both as scattered professing Christians and as a particular society. When the Church appears as a community, it is really, in Hodge's view, a contractual union of Christians who have decided that they are in sufficient agreement on certain doctrines and evidences of piety so as to be harmonious in their teaching of the plan of salvation and those other truths which would enhance the holiness of their membership. He partially disguised the character of this human association

¹Nichols, Romanticism In American Theology, pp.151, 97-98.

by reference to the Holy Spirit as the organizing principle for the church society or denomination, but for Hodge the work of the Holy Spirit is mainly that of inducing assent to truth in individuals rather than that of witnessing to the objective reality of Christ and His Church. It is this distinction between visible and invisible which leads him to accept federal unity of churches and reject organic unity. We have seen his persistent claim that each church society, especially the Old School Presbyterian Church, had the right and obligation to perpetuate its unique character even on the mission field. This displays an inadequate view of the nature and mission of the Church as the Body of Christ.

The Church is one because Christ is its Head and Body. It actually exists and participates in the Person of its Head, Jesus Christ. The New Testament does not divorce the spiritual and the bodily unity of Christians. We are all one in Christ. It seems however that for Hodge the Church is the Body of the Spirit attached to its Head. We have been elected by God as individuals and not as a people. In Hodge's view, our spiritual union with Christ is as individuals arbitrarily selected to be visited with the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and added one by one to a theocratic spiritual body whose members form themselves into a republican, ecclesiastical structure. There is no notion of our incorporation in Christ as a community.

It is Hodge's inadequate understanding of the humanity of Christ which led to this view of the Church's disconnected spirituality, individualism, rationalism and sectarianism. The humanity

of Christ is the essential foundation of the life and ministry of the Church. It is in His Person as well as through His Work that He restores our fallen humanity, and it is in the Church which is His Body that we are made one with one another and with God. This ontological relationship that the Church has with Jesus Christ is reaffirmed by His continual presence in and with the Church through the ministry of the Word and Sacraments by the power of the Holy Spirit. But for Hodge the sacraments are not the means through which the Church continues to participate in and witness to the Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ, rather they are only means of teaching the individual worshipper right doctrine and of providing a way for him to enhance his piety.

This individualistic and man-centered view of the sacraments finds a parallel also in Hodge's treatment of the office of the ministry. He teaches that the ministry is founded by Christ, but not that it is a participation in the continuing ministry of Christ. This leads in turn to a confusion in his understanding of the power of order and the power of jurisdiction. He never adequately distinguished between the ordering of government and the ordering of worship. Thus the authority of the people represented by their elders partially circumvented the Christological significance of the minister's ordination, of his ministry of Word and Sacraments, and of his endowment with the power of order.

The inadequate Christological foundation of Hodge's doctrine of the Church is further exemplified in his treatment of the unity of the Church. His refusal to recognize the necessity or even the

desirability of the organic unity of the Church has already been described in his acceptance of the sufficiency of spiritual unity and in his advocacy of Old School sectarianism. This however is really a refusal to recognize the given oneness of the Body of Christ and the full meaning of the ministry of reconciliation. When the Church proclaims the Gospel of reconciliation, she must live this gospel. Christians must be what they are in Christ. They would be guilty of a kind of antinomianism if they lived otherwise. The federal unity of churches is wrong with its continuation of independent, autonomous church structures. Federal unity implies unrepentant doctrine. Churchmen who advocate this might say that they are open to recognizing and respecting the other church societies, but their formulations of truth and schemes of polity take precedence over any openness to change or even to Truth itself. They are in a sense insincere when they sit down in communion with other churchmen unless they are pledged to reconciliation. An act of communion is a recognition of the given unity of the Body of Christ and a commitment to its fullest realization. As Christians approach the Lord's Table they feed upon the body and blood of Christ Who in His person and work has accomplished full reconciliation of man to God and man to man and Who seals by the Holy Spirit this reconciliation in His worshipping community.

Hodge's basic misunderstanding of the nature of the Church also falsifies the understanding of its mission. For Hodge the redemptive work of Christ is only effective for the elect. The divine decree is prior to redemption. This means that the real mission of the Church is limited to the teaching of doctrine to the elect and

increasing their personal piety and to the moral instruction of society.

But the mission of the Church in the world is to preach the gospel of salvation which means proclaiming Christ who makes all things whole. His redemption is not disassociated from creation. Nor is His gospel separated from the law. The work of Christ and the sphere of His redemption is not limited to the elect as Hodge thought it was. Christ lived, died and rose again for all mankind. The Holy Spirit enables the Church to respond intensively to what has been accomplished in Christ; that is, to live in the new creation while it dynamically moves toward its completion at Christ's Second Coming. The Holy Spirit also enables the Church to witness extensively to the new humanity established in Christ. This means that the Church does not teach merely the moral precepts of God which are supposedly, according to Hodge, innate in the constitution of man. Instead it proclaims the fulfilled law as revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is not only the nature of the Church which is misunderstood when law is made prior to gospel, creation separated from redemption, nature understood apart from grace, and when God is "known" apart from Jesus Christ. There is also a misunderstanding of the world. Hodge's individualism and anthropocentrism reinforced and justified a view of the relation of Church and society already widespread among churchmen of his day. The gospel of reconciliation which the Church was to teach seemed to be reserved for the eternal salvation and piety of the individual and was never to threaten the status quo.

The Church's enjoining of the law became a negative task which presupposed the covenant of works and which was void of any grace. With the Protestant moral law innate in the American society, the Church became reluctant to study the socio-economic problems, especially in institutions which were established by divine providence. Everything was seen in terms of individual morality which in turn was supposed to maintain the morality of society. However, the Church's true existence and mission is the act of being the bearer of salvation within and to the structures and institutions of society, as well as to individuals.

Thus Hodge's dichotomy between the invisible and visible Church, neither of which was understood in Christological terms, demonstrates the central defect of his theology which is that it is not centered in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He was basically unaware that the Church is the visible Body of Christ which stands within time and within historical and social relationships through which men are reached by God's redemptive, living Word - Jesus Christ, who is truth and forgiveness and in whom reconciliation has been accomplished. The life and mission of the Church is not the static accumulation and summation of the faith and piety of the elect. Instead its life is its incorporation in and witness to its one Lord, one faith and one baptism. She lives dynamically as a visible, redeemed fellowship proclaiming to the world of this age the realized promise of God's Grace in Jesus Christ. The Church as the Body of Christ lives expectantly in the midst of its continual dying and rising again in Christ, with the sure hope of being brought to full-

ness in Christ in the age to come. It is this eschatological dimension, the sense of expectancy, the awareness of the Church Militant which is the dynamic manifestation of Christ in the world that is missing from Hodge's doctrine of the Church.

In spite of the considerable defects in Hodge's ecclesiology, he can be admired for his attempt to give this a theological grounding amidst the more radical, speculative theologies, partisan ecclesiastical and political feelings and the emotional revivalism of his day. Even his limited understanding of the nature and mission of the Church was a considerable advance on the views of many of his contemporaries.

The study of Charles Hodge and his teaching on and participation in the Church is by no means of mere academic interest. Although conditions of his time are different from those of today, the problems, the successes and even more the failures of the Presbyterian Church in America are very much the same.

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